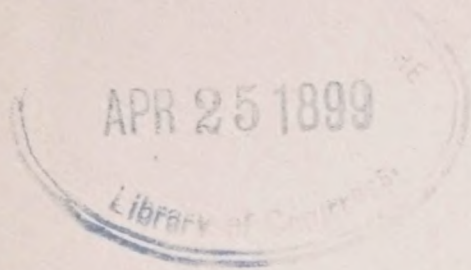


DOUBLE JEOPARDY!

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W. C. STILES

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Double Jeopardy!

A NOVEL

BY
W. C. STILES

NEW YORK

THE HOME PUBLISHING COMPANY

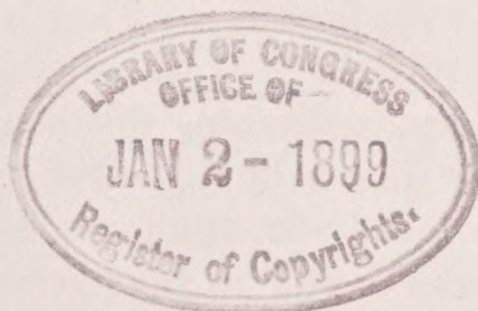
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DOUBLE JEOPARDY!

CHAPTER I.

"LET ME SAVE YOU FOR MY OWN SAKE."

"And I say the peril is terrific. She will be arrested; she will die."

"Not in America."

"Yes."

"Not by the law."

"By the law—or by assassination."

The brilliantly-lighted room turns ghostly to the vision of Harris Vanderveer. He looks at the ugly figure before him, but he can not doubt the honesty and sincerity of Benonski.

The music from the little orchestra hidden by banks of flowers prevents the conversation from being overheard by others. The room is full of well-dressed people. Vanderveer, young, blonde, romantic, and handsome as a god, looks away from the Russian and across the room.

She is there—the one. How his eyes light as they rest upon her! Brauna, glory of all his world—passionate incarnation of woman's splendor! In her smile Vanderveer lives. The Russian follows his glance, and presently recalls him to himself and to the situation by saying, gloomily:

"It may be too late to save her from arrest. What will you do?"

"It was a political crime; done in Russia."

"Not so. To every intent it was a personal crime. And it was done in New York."

"Who killed Ferrand Merki?"

"His wife, Brauna Alvaroff Merki."

"That lie I shall live to destroy. What is the evidence?"

"It is complete. She was seized in the very act."

"In the act?"

"Yes. He gasped and died on the instant they seized her. Three times she had plunged her little stiletto into his heart. Then she was free. Holy Czar! think you that I blame her? Not I. He was a devil, I say."

"Why do they follow her now? Who is doing it?"

"Ah! That is the thing that I do not understand. It is believed that she, or Alvaroff—her father—betrayed the Moscow league to the officers of the government. That would be sufficient motive."

"It is Russia in New York then; and this occurred more than seven years ago. I have heard that there is a Russia in New York. So! They reach out their hands over five thousand miles of sea and land to strike down a woman. And all for revenge. They call that Nihilism."

"Perhaps not all for revenge, Mr. Vanderveer. She is beautiful. She turns the head. And there is money—a million dollars. Do not think, sir, that you are the only man that ever smiled in the presence of this goddess."

The Russian raises his eyebrows in a grimace. Then, assuming a more serious attitude, he continues: "But she is worth saving, and at the worst there will be a way that you know nothing about. But not yet—not yet. Come; follow me to the balcony for a minute. You will see a man there in a footman's garb. He will pretend to pay no attention to you. He has come from Mercer Street, nevertheless. They have succeeded in calling in the local authorities. That means that they are sure they have a clear case."

"The house is watched, then?"

"More than that: it is surrounded. Russia is not only in New York City; Russia is here, Russia is everywhere where the wronged exiles of her soil have a grievance to avenge. And before the evening is gone Russia will make a display. It is for us to try to outwit Russia."

The Russian thereupon abruptly leaves Vanderveer's side and disappears through the curtained arch leading to the main hall. Vanderveer, glancing about to note whether his actions are observed, follows in the same direction.

To the world Dr. Mark Carrington and his daughter Brauna are ordinary residents of the metropolis. They have wealth and refinement, and make their summer home at this elegant seaside retreat known as Graystone. In New York Carrington affects the practice of surgery, and attends to the investment of his great wealth. Their standing in the society where they have been introduced has been assured, not only by their culture and wealth, but by the beauty of Brauna and the evident high character of both.

Yet they have a history of exciting interest, entirely unknown to the people nearest to them. The history of a danger and a crime. To-night this history returns and threatens them.

Even as the beautiful parlors of Graystone resound with the merry laughter and chattering voices of a score or more of pretty girls and an equal number of interesting bachelors of high degree, from neighboring villas and the unpretentious but rather exclusive nearby hotel. They are flirting, singing, laughing, and talking, as they group, disperse, and regroup, rustling and flitting in the kaleidoscope of endless activities, that mean as much and as little as society play usually signifies. The rooms are gay with color and rich with the perfume of flowers, banked and trailed and wreathed and festooned about all the walls and tables. In every line and shadow and grouping of the elegant house are evidences of taste, culture, and wealth.

They are arranging a piece of amateur acting to be given later in the evening. As they plan and chatter, John Waters, tall, quiet, gray-eyed, and of perfect address, converses with Blanche Evanston, leaning indolently on the corner of the piano.

"Oh, it is a charming house," Blanche is saying, with a smiling face the while, as if life were a continual and perennial charm to her. "It must be

lovely to be so rich. They say her father was a contractor in some foreign country—Russia was it?”

“Possibly.”

“Did not you tell me she is a Russian?”

“Oh, did I? I must have heard some one say so, then. There is no end to the things one may hear, especially if one talks with you ladies.”

“Horrid slanderer! But if only you knew how many things we *don't* tell.”

“As for them we have only to wait,” laughs Waters, showing his white teeth in a little smile. “But I supposed you enjoyed her confidence. You and she are close friends, I have noticed.”

“Actual chums, Mr. Waters. Do we not ride or drive together every day? And when Brauna isn't at my house, I am at her house. But she seldom talks about herself; neither do I. But you see I refrain in my case because I want to be honest. It wouldn't do to tell all the truth about me, don't you know. Can't you say some good thing about consistency like that?”

“If you didn't mean that your friend keeps silent about herself for a similar reason.”

“Brauna? Not at all. It's from modesty. She hasn't anything but good she can say of herself. She's the soul of all goodness. Let no one dare deny that or we will quarrel, Mr. Waters.”

“Oh, not with me. I never doubted.”

“And, of course, you are equally convinced that my opposite reasons for not talking of myself are sound, I suppose?”

“You said it yourself. If you insist on disparaging yourself—but why do you think her a Russian?”

“I don't know, I'm sure; unless you or some one told me. The name isn't Russian. ‘Carrington’ must be English or American.”

“True; but people often change their names, especially foreigners.”

Blanche looks at him placidly, with eyes as blue as the sky, and a face as faultless and innocent as the face of a new doll. Had John Waters been less skilled he might easily have believed that she was as innocent as

she appears. Did Blanche know anything of Brauna? Or is she simply trying to sound him? Waters is not sure.

But glancing about the room several things alarm him. He sees among the guests men whose faces he knows all too well. He has observed, a little earlier, the strange footman upon the balcony. And in the back parlor are two or three other servants, who more than once under his eyes have made a signal that John Waters recognizes. Nevertheless this man goes on with the light conversation, while the young lady makes pretty sallies and various little jests with him in the flow and interflow of bright repartee, not observing how his attention is distributed. At length Waters, framing a plan in his mind, looks straight at Blanche, saying nonchalantly: "The fellow with the lavender tie and side whiskers now—what is his name? I think I saw you smiling at him a moment since."

Was it a fancy, or did he catch a little paling of the carnation of her cheeks and a slight, swift gleam of alarm in her blue eyes? But instantly, if it were so, they are gone, and she looks across to the man he has pointed out, as unruffled as before.

"That man?" she says, with a little drawl, as if bored. "Oh, that is Mr. Godby; one of the gentlemen from the hotel."

"Comes recommended, I suppose? Who vouches for him, I wonder? Looks a trifle out of place, doesn't he? Doesn't seem to know what to do with his hands."

"I don't know who recommends him; he is good enough, I fancy. They say he is rich too. I'll introduce you if you like."

"Rich is he? Awkward, too. No, thank you; some other time will do. I can't give you up yet, merely to be introduced to a doubtful person like Mr. Godby."

Blanche laughs a steely sort of laugh, and John Waters scrutinizes her closely while her eyes are wandering in some other direction. He believes somehow that she knows more about Mr. Godby than she has confessed.

But after a few more jests with Blanche he makes his

way cautiously across the room by little stages that betray no purpose that he has to any eye. He thinks it is time to warn *her*. He no longer has any doubt. The net is spread, and this fair woman who is the bird about to be snared is evidently unsuspecting and unprepared.

Waters gossips a little here and jests a little there, while making his way toward her.

"Ah, Miss Carrington, busy time it is with you, I see," he says, getting near her at length. "But you entertain us all as if it were a mere nothing with you." Then in a tone so low that she alone hears him, this fine master of strategy, being close at her side, says quickly: "Separate yourself from this company at once. I must speak to you alone. Show no surprise to any one. You are watched."

Brauna turns on him nevertheless with a plainly startled expression.

He had ever been a little mysterious to her. One day he has betrayed an alarming knowledge of Russia; at another time he has seemed to be startled at the mention of certain Nihilists who had been apprehended; but she has felt in him somehow the touch of a friendly spirit.

"Don't speak," he whispers. "Take me with you anywhere, alone. Any excuse will do."

With the thought of possible dangers to be met, Miss Carrington instantly calms herself, saying sweetly, in the hearing of several of the guests: "Oh, Mr. Waters, I promised to give you a task, and I will. Come along now, and bring in the vase I showed you. Right back, ladies! Mr. Waters is harnessed to service, I would have you observe."

She takes Waters's arm and they leave the room together, both laughing back at the gay company as they go. Waters, going out, sees one of the waiters whom he had before noted making the familiar signal, leave his place, and follow them. He also sees Godby separating himself from his group and glancing after his prey.

"Do not go out of the house," says Waters, in her ear. "Go to the very center of the room—the music

room or library—and sit so that no one can come within earshot without our knowledge.”

Seeing the intensity of his manner she obeys, then asks, as a trembling sigh escapes her:

“Who are you, and what do you know of me, Mr. Waters?”

She looks at him with a haggard smile, unable to read his cold, pale face.

“I know,” says John Waters, very quietly, “that this house is full of detectives. Some of them are Nihilists, two of them carrying the badges of the secret service of New York, although it is, of course, unknown to the authorities that they are Nihilists. But every one of them will be glad to help in the arrest of yourself and your father, not because Ferrand Merki was found dead one day, stabbed with a stiletto, but for reasons that I do not know, but wish to discover.”

Brauna scarcely suppresses a shriek that is even beginning to issue from her lips. “Are you a friend or an enemy?” she gasps.

A strange expression creeps into John Waters’s face. There is a hot red flush upon his cheeks; into his eyes leaps a flame of intense passion that, could she see it, would warn her of all that he wishes to say. But for a little he averts his face, but quickly commanding himself, he replies, very gently: “*Friend*, yes; I am a friend of any whom I can help—of you more than of any other—it may be.”

“Of me, and of him—my father? You are a friend, as against those who seek to destroy us?”

“Let that pass. If I were not your friend would I be here, think you, to warn you of this peril? But let us suppose I am against no one.”

“It matters not. You have spoken of a history long buried in the dust of the past. Why are we followed? It should have been forgotten.”

“I say so, too. But some one has revived the past. I mean to make that plainer to myself later on.”

“And you will be a friend to me?”

“A *friend!*” he echoes. “Have you not read my heart? I adore you—you; you—the only

woman under heaven's stars for me, Brauna! *Let me save you for my own sake!*"

It is a revelation so sudden, so intense, that it brings the swift color rushing to Miss Carrington's cheeks.

"Oh, Mr. Waters—for the love of heaven! No! no! You must know—do you not know—that I can not — Indeed you know why."

"I do. Mr. Vanderveer."

She droops her burning face. In a moment Waters says, huskily:

"I am only another fool moth singed in the flame, Miss Carrington. Vanderveer is lucky as an angel, and I am not. But I don't hate the fellow. It is good to love as I love you, even if—if it gripes my heart like a fatal wound. And you are sure there is no hope for me at all?"

"None; I love Mr. Vanderveer."

"It is a sacred confidence that you give, and shall be sacredly respected."

"And you will be my friend—still?"

"WHEN MY LIFE CAN SERVE YOU I SHALL LAY IT DOWN AS THE MOST WORTHLESS THING I HAVE."

He speaks very quietly as he looks sadly into her beautiful face, his own grown haggard as in a moment with the pangs of a crushed hope.

"Tell me, then, how serious is this danger," she begs, her terror beginning to return.

"Trust me. The danger is here. It is not safe for you nor for me that we should long remain together. Whatever you may see to-night to shake your faith in me, wait patiently. Follow the course of action that you see plainly before you. Above all, pay no heed to any plans that may be made for you by the man whom you love. He can not possibly save you. Probably he will try. In fact, he is very certain to try. Let him think whatever he pleases for the present. On no account are you to inform him or any one that I am operating. Speak my name to no one."

"You say that you know all, Mr. Waters. Then you know what may be possible of me—of my history; what some are willing to say against me. I shall be arrested for—for—murder, shall I not?"

"Yes."

"Which I did not commit."

"Which you did not commit."

"And the chain of circumstances forms a completed evidence, it is said. There will be a clear case against me?"

"I—I have heard so."

"They will drag me into the courts."

"If they can."

"That is a blow against me, and also to destroy my father, is it not?"

"Yes. If your destruction does not destroy him with the grief of it, then he will nevertheless be destroyed in some other way, if possible."

"Mr. Waters, who is doing this? Tell me, if you know."

"The enemy works in secret, Miss Carrington. I can not yet trace him, nor identify his motive."

"Is it——? Mr. Waters, do you know the code of the Nihilists?"

"I have heard; but whatever they are doing in this case I am sure they are not acting alone. Merki—who was killed—was not a good Nihilist. There is no code of the Moscow League that would set that organization to revenging his death after seven years of silence. Nevertheless, I am equally certain that the League is interested. Behind them, or with them, is some more powerful and direct interest. A new influence in this matter has come into the League itself. It looks as if somewhere there has been added to the desire of the League to punish your——, the man that was supposed to have betrayed the League—a personal motive that seems aimed against you also. Merki was killed. But who were Merki's friends?"

"Alas, I know not."

"He was your husband?"

"In name only, and for a day only."

"You did not love him?"

"I abhorred him—I hated him."

"Yet you married him?"

"Yes; there was indeed a marriage."

"It was your stiletto that killed him."

"Yes; but not in my hand. I had not seen the little weapon for months."

"Yet the assassin, whoever he may have been, was never seen. It appears that no one found out how he could have come into that house, nor how he went out. Who were the men who seized you on that day?"

"Two servants of Merki."

"It may have been one of these that killed him."

"That would have been impossible. I heard him shriek, struggle, and fall. He was barely beyond the curtain in the adjoining room. I rushed in at once. My cries aroused the servants. They were both down in the court. I was looking out of the window when I heard his shriek and saw them there. Then they rushed in. They thought there had been a quarrel, and that I had stabbed Ferrand. That is all."

"I have heard something before. I am well informed, and am glad to know the matter from your own lips. Now we must talk no more."

He walks away, saying, as he goes:

"Remember my instructions."

He has kept his eyes about him all the while, looking here and there, and fancies that there are signs in the stir of the curtains that hang from the doorway that it is time to separate himself from the imperiled woman. She is obliged to summon to her aid all her womanly resolution to enable her to rise with a smile and follow Waters back to the gay parlors. He has exercised the wit to carry back with him a vase that he has found on a near table.

Re-entering the parlors he sees Mr. Godby glancing about, and studiously avoiding him. Waters goes directly to Godby, with a little gesture that brings his man to a standstill with a stare of astonishment in his face.

"It is a good deal of a Siberian evening," says Waters, looking Godby in the face. Then, gently pushing him out of earshot of the chattering women whom he was affecting to entertain, Waters says, in a lower tone, heard only by Godby:

"You are not to make the arrest until I say the word. I am in charge, if you please."

"You? Not that I know about. I was sent by De Lani, and by Oxby, the New York chief. We are not to figure unless—it is to be a civil arrest."

"Sent by De Lani; so was I. Also by the chief's chief. Here is my card."

Godby reads the card with astonishment and awe.

"Then you could not have been *sent*. You are the whole thing. Oxby did not tell us that you were to be here in person. How is it?"

The man stares at Waters, unable to recover at once from his surprise.

"Oxby is a shrewd enough fellow for ordinary work. This matter must be a sure thing. He should have come himself. When I found that he had not done so, I decided at the last moment that the affair is too important to leave to the department men, especially in view of the victim's ability. He escaped once, you may know, so I am here to oversee. Repeat your orders from Oxby."

"We are to take the girl, also her father. Oxby asserted that it is necessary to involve him. The coroner's verdict at the headquarters specifies both. It is an affair seven years old."

"Exactly. It was a murder. She does not look so very dangerous. But you will do your duty. How many men are with you?"

"Four; two of them outside."

"That will do. The thing will be simple and easy; but you are to look sharp. If she was one to ply her stiletto, she may be one to resort to something as bad when she finds herself in limbo. Remember, she gave them all the slip once—he too."

"They will not be able to do that again, Mr. Waters."

"I have heard of you, Godby; you are from France, I believe—from Paris, in fact. In France they are very sharp, are they not?"

Godby is uneasy under this question, quite palpably so, his eyes shift about while he looks around, as if he wanted to get away from the cool and steady gaze of his superior.

"In France," he says, at length, pretending to

laugh a little in a plainly forced fashion, "they catch the greatest criminals easily. How did you guess that I have been in France?"

"Merely by the accent, Mr. Godby. It is so, isn't it?"

"And you are very sharp to notice it. I flatter myself that my accent is even more English than my beard. But it is said that John Waters can see through a very thick stone wall with ease."

"Thank you for the compliment. You have only to manage this affair well to bear out your commendation of the French. But you are to use no unnecessary publicity, and no brutality whatever. Mind now; quiet work is the best. Do you know the details of the case?"

"No; only what the warrant reveals. It was a murder—seven years ago. She escaped arrest after—or before the coroner's finding against her. The case has been revived, has it not?"

"Palpably. There is a good deal behind, I have been told. That need not concern you, however. By the way, that is a very pretty girl there; Miss Evanston, I mean. You know her, I see."

Waters glances at Blanche Evanston, surrounded as usual by a little group of men, and then looks fixedly at Mr. Godby. He feels sure that there is a secret behind Godby's shifting eyes, and believes him to be lying when he replies: "Oh, yes; pretty as need be. Yes; a very little only—a mere summer acquaintance."

Waters laughs, and answers, lightly:

"You have a great liking for pretty women, Mr. Godby."

In spite of the cool, careless manner of Waters, Godby feels thin-shelled and uncomfortable before those steely and really terrible eyes. He is not only uneasy, but entirely uncertain of his ground. But he is here on a deadly errand. The scope of it he does not know, much less the quality and spirit of the moving powers behind him. The situation is full of mystery to others besides Godby, and surcharged with all the elements of possible tragedy. The threatened victims of the conspiracy are Brauna and her father.

CHAPTER II.

“YOU ARE BOTH UNDER ARREST.”

Harris Vanderveer and Benonski come back from the balcony with a plan in their heads for saving the woman whom Vanderveer loves. At the slip below the long lawn is a swift little yacht. If they can get the fugitives aboard that yacht, favored by the darkness they may elude pursuit and escape. They believe that the house is surrounded, or at least well guarded all about, and both understand the nature of the peril. Brauna has told Vanderveer the story of the murder seven years ago and the story of the dreadful accusation against her and her former escape from it. He stakes his faith and his future happiness upon her innocence and truth, and loves her all the more, if possible, on account of the peril that besets her.

It seems plain to this anxious lover that the contemplated arrest must at all costs be prevented. At the same time he believes that he alone can save her, the only one who will even care to try. He thinks that once in the power of those who have hunted her down after so many years she will certainly be pursued to death.

He believes that the power behind this pursuit is Russian. It is startling to his American experience to understand that such powers could operate in the daylight of modern life. Vanderveer has heard of the powerful league of Nihilist conspirators that have a home in New York. This blow may have come from them, or it may even be a complication that reaches to St. Petersburg. He has been told only that seven years before, a Russian officer, a Nihilist and a conspirator, has been struck down in a quiet house in Waverley Place by his own wife's stiletto. That wife, married indeed, but a wife in name only, is the woman he loves. What powers have now risen in the night to avenge this murder upon her who was guiltless of the crime he knows not. But wrapped in the flame of her beauty like melting mist in the embrace of the morning sunshine, he has thenceforth eyes only that he may look

on her, and ears only that he may dwell in the music of her flutelike voice, and wit only that he may think on this divine creature who had filled all horizons and pervaded all spaces, and transformed this elegant society idler with the touch of a new passion that whelms him in its depths.

He might not be capable of sustaining such an infatuation, for Vanderveer was not, with all his generous disposition and romantic sentiment, of the stuff of which consistency and faithfulness are made. Yet he has a deal of a sort of courageous and chivalrous devotion, and thrills at the thought of risking life itself if he has the chance in behalf of his adored one.

On his return to the parlors his first move is to communicate with her. She has stilled as best she can the tumult of her mind after her interview with Waters. Aided by Miss Evanston and several other ladies, she is arranging the stage on which their little theatricals are to be presented. He notes how she surpasses them all with her almost matchless beauty.

Yet there were many to say that the choice is almost equal between Brauna and Blanche. Blanche is a sweet creature, with the artless affectation of a child. In her ordinary moods she has not a flaw. Pink and white she is, and witty as a philosopher. Her tongue is as fine and engaging as the prattle of a child, and there is a kind of *chic* about her pose, and style, and laughter, and repartee, that has made Vanderveer wonder if she may not have been bred in Paris. And everybody says she is as artless as she looks. So open and natural is she in her expression!

"Such shirks you men are," she is saying, as she pouts her red lips at Vanderveer, approaching. "Why should you not work a little, too? Only—well, you would merely bungle everything; men always do."

She flashes at him her fine eyes, and even for the moment diverts him from his contemplation of the goddess.

"True, my dear Miss Evanston. My hands are all too unskilled for such delicate work."

Then, seizing a favorable moment amid the merry tumult, he says swiftly in Brauna's ear: "For God's

sake, grant me an interview. You are beset. This house is full of spies. You must escape."

"Be prudent. I know all," she answers, quietly.

He is startled and withdraws a little. Then, under cover of a burst of music from the orchestra he says, earnestly: "I have provided a way to escape, Brauna. I will see to it that no one shall harm *you*."

The trembling girl struggles with herself a little, half tempted to yield to this offered protection and commit her fortunes to his care. Surely he is the proper person to care for her in this hour, for he loves her. But the words of John Waters are still ringing in her ears. He has warned her that her lover will try to rescue her. But will it not be at great risk? And can he cope with this conspiracy? Brave as he is, he can not have measured the subtle and powerful nature of the forces arrayed against her. The conviction is upon her that Waters, not Vanderveer, is the man for this emergency.

She turns her dark eyes upon the man she so tenderly loves and in them he reads the adoration of her soul. Then, in a low, fond whisper that thrills him like music, she says: "I LOVE YOU."

Vanderveer, hearing this delicious woman whisper these three words, would have spurned Paradise in comparison.

"Do not fear," she continues. "I know the danger. I believe I shall escape. Ask nothing, dear. Wait and watch."

"No, no; listen to me, Brauna. Benonski has gone to the boat. When I give the word, here on this stage, follow me through the window to the balcony—the little balcony at the east side. There will be a ladder——"

"Wait, my love. We should be cut off instantly. The house is doubtless surrounded and watched. There will be a better way. Do not for my sake—for your own sake risk anything needlessly. You are too rash, my love. Wait!"

There is above her turbid emotions a calm and decisive manner that half astonishes yet half vexes Vanderveer. He wishes her in this hour to feel entire

dependence upon him and to trust herself completely to his protection. Foolish lover!

She seems to read his thought in the sudden gloomy drooping of his passionate eyes. "You must not doubt me, my love," she murmurs, in a slow, fond way. "It is not from the least doubt of your intentions. But I am sure you have not measured the situation as I have. Do nothing at all, dear, unless you see that all is lost without you. I am not friendless."

"Who, then, is working for you? Tell me."

"I will; but not now. Wait; all will be well, I hope. But papa is coming. Oh, heaven! that can only mean that he has seen danger. He too has come to warn me. He would not have left his chamber at this hour but for some very good reason. Let me go to meet him, at once."

A tall man with drooping, heavy gray moustache and dark eyes, of which Brauna's seemed but a mere glorious duplicate, is passing across the parlors, greeting the guests with a courtly grace that sits upon him like a thing of nature. This man Alvaroff, known here as Dr. Carrington, has once escaped from the toils of a web woven about him in years gone by in another land, where he has suffered with patriots in a cause that seemed holy. His suffering has given to his character a dignity that nevertheless outwardly veils a mind alert, resolute, and resourceful.

To-night, sitting in his chamber, gazing at the pages of a book that he is not reading, he has heard on his door a light and peculiar rapping. Hearing it he is startled and astonished. It is not that such a sound is totally unexpected, but it is because the manner of the curious repetition made by the person rapping at once transports this man in sudden imagination to Russia, and flashes upon him a history that he had hoped never to review.

He knows that it is not a rap merely, but also a signal that says to this man plainly: "YOU ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF ENEMIES. AROUSE, AND ESCAPE." Instantly, from the impulse of an active energy that flashes into his face, he rises and opens the door.

No one is in sight.

But he is neither deceived nor surprised.

He had not, in fact, expected to find any one at the door. But with a very accurate apprehension of the methods of the person who must have rapped out the signal, he looks up and down the door itself for a further sign of the visitor.

Yes; there is a sign.

A tiny ball of wax is sticking to the panel, a most innocent and inoffensive object indeed, as it would seem. But Alvaroff, seeing it, stands straight and white, staring at it as the confirmation of his fears.

"I thought so," he says, under his breath. He draws a stiletto from some concealment under his robe, and swiftly pries off the little ball of wax. It is not larger than a child's playing marble. He pricks it open with his dagger to find inside a bullet of lead foil, and within the lead a minute wad of tissue paper. This he carries into his chamber, carefully locking the door behind him. Under the light of his chandelier he reads the cipher, written in Slavic characters on the parchment—the secret cipher of the Moscow League!

"You and she will be seized to-night. Do nothing. Pay no attention to Vanderveer. If you can be saved at all it must be through the plans of

"NUMBER 66."

"He is here, then. That strange traitor that loved my daughter. I know not whether to bless him or curse him."

Alvaroff remembers that Number 66 has figured before in his own history, and he does not yet know whether he is a friend or an enemy. But whatever villainous or interested motives actuate the man who has warned him, he believes that the warning itself is no false alarm. The warning he must credit and act upon.

After seven years of peace in a new land, among new friends, tornados are now hurled at him out of his past. At him, and yet more at her, the only being left him in the world to love—his daughter.

Exchanging his robe and slippers for a more presentable apparel, he goes down to warn her.

They meet as if carelessly, and no one could have understood the subtle play of glances between them. Yet each knows instantly that the other is on guard.

Brauna, smiling on him as if telling him some careless gossip, says, in the Russian tongue, very low: "I know all. Thou art beset. Both thou and I are in deadly peril. The past is risen up that we thought forever buried. The hand of God has turned back the page."

John Waters is talking nearby with a pair of vivacious belles, who chatter and laugh with him constantly, but every instant his glittering eyes look over their heads or between them to take in Brauna's movements.

In spite of her good attempt at confidence, Brauna has been feeling some inevitable misgiving about Waters. He is so secret, so tremendous in his personality! If he should prove to be unswervingly a friend he might indeed move mountains to rescue her. But what if he should be willing to revenge himself for her refusal? Could he do it? Was this man capable of meanness and revenge? She has told him plainly that she loves another man.

"Who has warned you, my love?" asks Alvaroff, speaking indeed to her, but all the time glancing about the apartments with his searching eyes.

"Vanderveer."

"No one else?"

"Yes; Mr. Waters."

"Where is he? Point him out."

"There; yonder with those ladies."

Alvaroff looks, gives a start, and drops his eyes. Waters, on his part, who is reading everything in their interview very accurately, shifts his position and appears not to be conscious that Alvaroff is looking his way.

"It is clear to me now, my daughter," says Alvaroff, smiling. "That man's face was strangely familiar to me when a month ago he began coming here. Why does he warn you?"

The flush of embarrassment and her drooping eyes answered. They did not escape her father's observa-

tion. "This man loves you. I have not told you all the secret history of the Russian days. He loved you in Moscow, seven years ago."

"Impossible."

"It is true."

"But I never saw Mr. Waters until I came to this place and he began coming with the others this very summer."

"But I saw him. It may have been he who shot the guards at the Bouski Plaza. On the other hand, it may have been he who set the sleuthhounds of the government on our track, and frustrated the great conspiracy. In any case, ten days before you and I were seized, this man came to our house in Moscow. You were out of view, but it was you whom he would much rather have seen. He loved you; he had seen you often. At that time this man described the conspiracy that was gathering around us. He declared that the government was warned of the plans of the League. He adjured me to flee; he denounced Merki; he revealed his passion for you."

"Oh! And you never told me. Is he a friend, then?"

"I hope it, but I fear as much as I hope. It is he that has now for a second time warned us. When, tell me, did you learn that he loves you?"

"To-night; and he assures me that he, and he alone, can save us now."

Alvaroff shrugged his shoulders.

"You refused his love?"

"Yes."

"You have told Vanderveer?"

"No."

"Vanderveer, then, knows nothing of our danger?"

"Yes; Benonski has seen something to alarm him. Benonski has told Vanderveer."

"And Vanderveer will attempt to save us."

"I—I—fear so."

"And you fear he will fail."

"Alas, my father; I know not how to act."

"There will be a way. Wait."

"Advise me. Tell me your intentions."

"I, too, shall wait. If John Waters is a friend that will appear. I know men, and some are noble enough to save and help the woman who has wounded them. He is a Russian—or an American. And he is no ordinary man. Either he is a remarkable devil, or a marvelous——"

He pauses and smiles.

"But he warns me not to trust to Vanderveer's efforts. I revolt from that, and yet I have the irresistible feeling that I should obey this man. I know not why, but at best Vanderveer is brave, impulsive, and a rash move might ruin everything."

At that moment some one creeps up behind Alvaroff, saying, in a most polite and insinuating tone: "If you will please retire with your daughter to the library. A little matter of business."

Godby has exceeded his instructions. Alvaroff knows that the dread hour is come, and turning to Brauna, says, without a quaver in his voice: "Let us retire to the library, my dear. This gentleman wishes to speak with us alone."

Vanderveer, who has never taken his eyes away from this glorious creature in her yellow robes, divines that the detectives will wait no longer for their prey. He is agonized between the plan that he has made and the imploring prayer of Brauna that he may be prudent.

They are passing through the curtain. He feels that they are already in the clutches of an octopus, and that the conspiracy has been sprung.

This conclusion, and the horror it produces maddens the lover. In an instant he has decided. The next instant he acts. As Godby and his prey disappear, Vanderveer, rushing after, seizes the snake and drags him to the floor.

At the same instant John Waters slips through the curtains with two aids at his elbow. He stands suddenly before Brauna and her father, and says, with a strange light in his face that neither of them understand: "I advise quietness. You are both under arrest. If you resist I shall put irons on you at once. We have a warrant in due form. Mr. Vanderveer, you

are too precipitate. Give me the warrant, Mr. Godby."

Godby by this time has struggled to his feet.

"It is to you, then—YOU—that we owe this!" hisses Brauna, now the burning embodiment of scorching and blazing scorn, as she towers to her height and fixes her flaming eyes on Waters. He gives her an instant glance and visibly cowers before her wrath.

Then, seeing her, the idol of his soul, about to fall thus by damning treachery into the hands of her enemies, and, as he thinks, on her way to death, Vanderveer for the first time looks fully at Waters. His soul rages, believing that here at last is the seat and source of the danger. He gathers himself like a lion, and with an oath of terrible rage this elegant trifler flings himself at the throat of his enemy.

CHAPTER III.

"THERE IS HOPE YET."

Vanderveer is but a child, dashing himself against a man of iron. Waters, merely stepping back a pace, knocks him down. No one could have said how he does it, and it seems incredible that he can do it with so little injury.

Vanderveer is instantly seized by the men who have come in with Waters, and before he is quite recovered from the blow with which he has been felled, he is in irons.

Brauna, panting and raging like a lioness, is only restrained by her father from flinging herself upon this cold fiend who has thus smitten and insulted the man she adores.

"Wretch! Infamy in man's form. Oh, how I hate you!" she cries, hoarse with anger.

"We regret Mr. Vanderveer's precipitation, Miss Carrington," replies Waters, very coolly. "If you have influence with him I pray you advise him how useless his violence must be."

And Brauna, ready to break out in mad imprecations on this traitor's head, is nevertheless checked by a strange, underlying awe in the presence of such a personality.

"There need be no further sensation, I should say, Mr. Carrington," he continues, turning to Brauna's father, from this moment ignoring her. "If Mr. Vanderveer will agree to refrain from further interference we will not hold him to answer for resisting the officers. I advise you," turning to Vanderveer, "to give me your word for it, sir."

How cool he is! How full of a certain powerful dignity that controls the situation.

"I will answer for Mr. Vanderveer," replies the putative Carrington. "Quiet yourself, my love. Remember my advice," he continues, turning to his daughter, who has again turned upon Waters with scornful words. She looks with passionate eyes upon her lover, and her heart smites her that she has refused his offers of assistance and protection, and has trusted to this icy fiend who now controls all their destiny.

"I see that you are too powerful and also too brutal to be resisted at present," says Vanderveer, with bad grace. "Take off the irons. I will wait for a more favorable opportunity."

"Which you won't get, my man," says Godby, with a vindictive chuckle, enjoying the excess of Vanderveer's humiliation, for has not this furious fellow torn Godby's dress coat and thumped him down on the floor without ceremony? Waters, however, gives Godby a look that causes him to cringe and fall back.

"Take off the irons, Martin," commands Waters, to one of the subordinates. This being done, Waters goes on in the same cool, nerveless tones: "If you desire to save your friends any possible needless public exposure, Mr. Vanderveer, you are at liberty to make any such excuses to their guests in the parlor as you deem best."

"Where are you all, I wonder?" cries at this moment the voice of Blanche Evanston, who the next instant opens the curtains and comes in. Waters, instantly equal to the occasion, laughs, in a voice so

careless and natural that even the doll is deceived: "Ah, Miss Evanston. You nearly caught us in a vast conspiracy. In fact, you are dreadfully untimely in springing out upon us thus. Vanderveer, be so good as to carry Miss Evanston off again until we finish our deep plot."

His coolness astonishes them all, but Vanderveer, even in his turgid emotion, has sense enough to be anxious to save Brauna from the spiteful scrutiny of gossips. He bites his lip, but forces himself to smile and to follow up the farce that Waters has begun.

"You hear, Miss Evanston," he says. "Mr. Waters has very suddenly assumed the duty of master of ceremonies, and I must obey. You are therefore to be carried off, as per orders from the ruling powers."

"Oh! So I have to beg everybody's pardon, do I?" simpers Miss Blue-eyes.

"I guarantee I will coax the secret out of him, whatever it may be, once I get him in my train," she laughs, and, leaning on Vanderveer's arm, leaves them.

"A nasty night to get out," remarks Godby, as they are left, a group together. "Put on rain cloaks and——"

"I will direct affairs now, if you please, Mr. Godby. I do not intend to leave this place to-night, and I do not care to risk any miscarriage by putting these prisoners into other hands. If they escape now it will be beyond your power or mine to explain the matter. There is no need to go to-night, since it is so rainy. The wind is beginning to blow a tempest. You will guard the prisoners here until daylight."

Waters says this in a low tone heard only by Godby. Then, turning to his prisoners, he adds:

"I trust you see your situation and the futility of making any attempt to escape. You will therefore please designate a room where you may pass the remainder of the night together. We have no wish to discommode you unduly by exposing you to the storm. Besides, in the morning we shall be in ample time for the train."

"We seem to be in your power," says Carrington.

"It is the power of the law, sir."

"Which you have undertaken to represent. There might be more gracious occupation under the circumstances. But we shall be ready to go when you require."

"Will you lead the way, then, to such apartment as you may think best to occupy for the night?"

There is a sudden gleam in the eyes of Brauna as she looks meaningly at her father. But he seems not to be conscious of her mute hint.

"We will go to the—to my room, papa," she says, trying to conceal the agitation of her spirits.

"It will be necessary for Mr. Godby to accompany you, and, pardon me, he is instructed not to allow you to go beyond his sight. It is not necessary to remind you that a former escape has rendered this unusual caution imperative."

"No; not necessary. We remember very well. Our memory even reaches across the sea," replies Carrington, bitterly.

Waters gives no heed to this retort.

"I trust Mr. Godby most implicitly. He is as far beyond the reach of bribes as he is beyond the possibility of betraying the interests of his superiors.

Godby flushes, and a gleam of treacherous cunning lights in his eyes.

"It would be entirely safe if we guarded the doors, I suppose, with a man just outside," he ventures.

"It won't do," replies Waters, coldly. "You will remain in the room. I hold you responsible for the safe-keeping of the prisoners. And remember what a good reputation you have at stake, Mr. Godby."

He gives an imperious gesture, and Godby leads the way to the stairs, the prisoners following.

When they have entered the designated apartment Waters bids them sit down and says, coldly, to Carrington:

"Let me advise you to resign yourself to the situation, and if possible to sleep. You will find need for all the strength you have to-morrow, I imagine."

Outside, a heavy storm, sweeping in from the sea, is sending noisy splashes of rain against the panes. The wind in gusts is twisting the trees, and the in-

creasing boom and roar of the ocean is troubling the night. Blackness and terror cover the earth and veil the heavens.

Waters goes over to Godby, remarking:

"I will be in the next room. If any emergency arises fire your revolver. I will hear, and come at once. It will go hard with you if there is any slip in this business. But remember," continues Waters, "you are not to trouble the prisoners unnecessarily. You are here simply to guard them. And if you, sir, desire my presence for any reason, you or the young lady, Mr. Godby will call me. Permit me to take my leave."

He bows very low, not even meeting the flashing eyes of Brauna, as she tries again to whip him with her scorn, and leaves the room.

He stations a man at the door outside. He is thorough and inexorable, so Mr. Godby decides, as the door closes behind him and the man is left alone with his prisoners.

It is now half-past twelve.

Down in the parlors the delicious Blanche Evanston, that doll-faced and voluptuous creature, is having a lovely time exploiting Vanderveer. She hangs on his arm and coos at him, triumphing over half a dozen other beauties, who are entirely convinced that he is adorable, and are willing accordingly to lure him away.

"Tell me that deep, deep secret now, you bad man. What plot were you all concocting out there in the hall?" she cries, pausing a little to pin a pansy in his buttonhole.

"To be sure—it is nothing so very dreadful, then. In fact, I do not quite know what it is myself. But I believe it was a visitor from New York with some sort of disagreeable news. Some old acquaintance—a cousin, I believe—drowned a day or two since."

He is a very bad liar, and bungles the thing dreadfully. His nature is too transparent. Blanche immediately sees that he is floundering quite out of his element.

"Ah, some trouble. I am so sorry," she sighs. "Brauna will not return then?"

"No; we must explain. Will you help me?"

She glances at him, seeing his confusion. She knows in her heart that he is burning to flee to the side of his love. To keep him here she must pay the price.

"Oh, by all means. I can lie better than you can, you fine simpleton," she replies, rather saucily; then adds, almost in a whisper, "But don't for heaven's sake stalk along with that Hamlet expression, Mr. Vanderveer."

Seeing the wisdom of this familiar advice he forces a smile, feeling really grateful to Blanche. For is she not a close and dear friend of his divinity?

So these two go about, telling a nice artful lie about Brauna. And the dear ladies and the guileless gentlemen very politely believe all they say, reserving their real opinions, however, for private gossip. It goes around, however, that Brauna had news from New York—some friend suddenly dead—a severe shock—and so on. These fine society friends would be glad to know what had really happened, but they are too well bred to linger, so they take an early departure and have their gossip afterward.

Blanche and Vanderveer are at last left, of them all. And she must go. The carriage is waiting for her. She can not longer detain him at her side. He tries not to be rude in disengaging himself from the charming raillery and smiles of Miss Evanston. She passes out to her carriage, and he at once runs up the stairs. At the top of them there is a guard.

"I am obliged to detain you, sir," says the man, showing the badge on his coat.

"Where are your prisoners?"

"In that room. Mr. Godby is on guard with them."

"Where is that man Waters?"

"In the adjoining room."

"Call him. I wish to talk with him."

The officer hesitates.

"You have no orders to the contrary?"

"No."

"Do as I request, then."

An hour has passed since Godby went on guard over the prisoners. Waters has placed this man on the

upper landing as an extra precaution, purposely to intercept the lover. The guard, after a little more parleying, goes to the room where Waters has shut himself in and raps on the door.

"Martin," calls a voice from within.

"Yes. Gentleman to see you. Mr. Vanderveer."

"Rap at this door about daylight," says Mr. Waters, from within. Then he suddenly opens the door and says to Vanderveer: "Go to your—to some room, Mr. Vanderveer, and sleep. Nothing will change until daylight. Then, if you desire to see me, return to this door."

The cold smile that lingers in Waters's face rouses the anger of Vanderveer.

"Why do you follow this man? Who are you?" he asks, hotly.

"Come at daylight. Good-night, Mr. Vanderveer."

He shuts the door. Vanderveer has the sense not to press further his desire to see Waters, but to the guard he says:

"I wish to see and speak with Miss Carrington and her father."

"Impossible! I advise you to wait, as Mr. Waters says."

The man being firm in his obedience, Vanderveer goes downstairs again. Here he finds Benonski, crouching in the shadow of a curtain. The Russian, on seeing Vanderveer, rises up, his squat figure and pale face set against the velvet, looking like some ugly shade himself.

"Our plan is beaten," says Vanderveer, with a gloom in his voice and face that the Russian comprehends at once.

"Yes. But something can doubtless be done. Where are they?"

"In Brauna's chambers. The man Godby is with them. Waters is in the next room. Can we not find a way to communicate?"

"Holy Czar! In her chambers, say you? Come with me. There is hope yet. Move like a cat. Breathe like a zephyr. *Come!*"

There is a new light in the ugly face of the Russian.

Taking Vanderveer's hand, he cautiously leads him through the hall.

CHAPTER IV.

"TRY YOUR HAND WITH SPARROWS—ON THE WING."

The storm raging without, a mere elemental strife, could not be more tempestuous than the hearts within.

When daylight struggles through the clouds the storm clears. Vanderveer and Benonski ascend the stairs, where the guard is still at his post, alert and sleepless.

The lover and the faithful servant have not passed the night sleeping, nor have they passed it vainly. There is mud on their garments and a new light in their eyes.

As they creep up the stairs Vanderveer says, in a low tone:

"To prolong to the last instant, to delay and dally—to make time; don't forget—this is now our cue, Benonski."

The Russian answers with an intelligent flash of his eyes.

"You keep watch like a night hound, I see," says Vanderveer to the guard. "It is coming daylight. Perhaps your superior will condescend to grant us an interview now?"

"Shall I speak to him, sir?"

But Vanderveer and Benonski are in no haste to arouse Waters. Time! This was the thing they most desire, so use all their wit to keep Martin in conversation as long as they decently can. They ply him with puzzling questions until their willingness to delay seeing Waters begins to awaken a shade of suspicion that all is not as it should be. After nearly a half hour, therefore, Martin resolves to take the responsibility upon himself and arouse his chief. Vanderveer and the Russian dare not oppose this intention, when it is expressed, lest Martin should be alarmed. They appear, therefore, to acquiesce in his purpose, and even

pretend to be anxious to see Waters at once. They follow Martin, and in answer to their rapping, Waters presently opens the door. He is the same smiling, unruffled man who had shut Vanderveer out a few hours ago.

"Good morning, gentlemen. I observe that you are prompt with your appointment. Come in. You are Benonski, Carrington's man, I think," he remarks, turning to the Russian. "I remember you."

He closes the door behind them and motions them to be seated.

"I have come to learn why you hunt these friends of mine, and what you mean?"

Vanderveer stands straight as an oak tree in the forest, looking in Waters's face, as in the face of a deadly enemy.

"There is a coroner's verdict, is there not? She is accused of a—pardon me—of a crime."

"Seven years have passed. Now you come here like a sneaking spy; you worm yourself into the society that gathers about her; you set a trap and seize her. You are not merely vindicating law. What, then, is your base motive, you hound!"

There comes a flush into Waters's cheek, and a little glitter in his eye, as Vanderveer hurls at him this fierce, insulting epithet.

"You have an expressive vocabulary, Mr. Vanderveer. It does not seriously affect my composure, however. May it not occur to you that I am making this arrest because I am ordered to do so by my superiors?"

"I don't believe it."

"I can not undertake to regulate your beliefs, Mr. Vanderveer."

"But you can give me satisfaction for your insults. I will allow that you talk in the language of a gentleman, and I will forget, if you please, that you are, in fact, a spy and a scoundrel. Then you may not be disinclined to save yourself from being called also a coward. The rain has stopped, you will observe. Mr. Benonski will accompany us to the garden. Your man Martin, at the door, will serve for you, perhaps."

"Revolvers, I suppose?" says Waters, with a little laugh, as if at the absurdity of the challenge.

"They seem to be the only available things that will kill. I hope you have some knowledge of their use."

A strange smile runs over Waters's face. He steps to the window. The birds are tuning their throats in the tree tops, and the light mists are suffusing with the touch of coming sunrise.

Waters draws down the sash at the top and looks out. A little breeze fans his high, full brows. There is a sad, far-off look creeping into his gray eyes. He remains there for a moment, looking out across the drenched green grasses of the lawn, where the gleam of the inlet bounded the vision, beyond the whispering trees. He seems unconscious that any one is near. Then suddenly he says:

"Be so kind as to come to the window, Mr. Vanderveer."

Vanderveer, half fascinated by the tremendous magnetism of this wonderful man, in spite of his temptation to hate him vehemently, yields to this invitation, and approaches the window. Taking a small silver-mounted revolver from his pocket, Waters turns to the open casement, and looks out, remarking:

"It will be a fine day, Mr. Vanderveer. See how the light mist yonder is tinting with the approaching sunbeams. Nature is at her best after her storms. These quick southeasters are great fresheners of our seaside landscapes. All the fine dust is washed from the grasses and leaves, you see."

Vanderveer looks at him with a scornful curiosity.

"And, by the way, notice what a splendid note those orioles make in the morning. It is quite too horrible to imagine how quickly one might finish the note. But there are even some who shoot the pretty things. Ah! Those pests, the sparrows, have driven the magnificent fellow away. It is ever so—the finest are prey to the basest. The little robbers! I've a mind——"

And then suddenly Vanderveer sees the most marvelous feat he has ever witnessed. Two little English sparrows have swooped down upon a branch twenty or perhaps even thirty feet from the point where they stand, driving away a golden robin that has been singing there. In the midst of his careless talk, dreamily

looking out, Waters's hand suddenly goes up, and at the same instant, so quickly it seems impossible he could have aimed at all, the little revolver cracks. The bird farthest away is hurled, with feathers flying, to the ground. The other flies. There is a second crack of the weapon in John Waters's hand, and ten yards from the branch its flight ends.

John Waters, still with the dreamy, cold smile in his face, turns in the window and looking full at Vanderveer, remarks, lightly:

"We would better postpone the meeting, Mr. Vanderveer. If in ten minutes you should stand up with me as you propose, in eleven minutes you would be dead."

"You are a fiend!"

"Reserve your opinions a little. Your chief fault is your too hasty impulsiveness. When you practice with the pistol, Mr. Vanderveer, try your hand with sparrows—on the wing."

"You will not give me satisfaction—that is what you mean?"

"Oh! I merely am advising you against suicide. It is too unequal, and you are too young, pardon me, and too handsome to die. Useful, too, I daresay, in your own way. If you are the betrothed lover of Miss Carrington, as common rumor has it, then it occurs to me that you may be more serviceable to her if you undertake to live. It is quite a more sensible thing, in my opinion, than making a target for a man who snuffs candles with bullets at thirty paces."

"Be sure, if I live, I shall not want for means to save her, you devil!"

"That will be far more profitable, should you succeed, than calling me names. I shall offer no objection to your company on our way to New York, if you choose to go. And that reminds me that it is nearly time we were stirring. I wonder Mr. Godby has not sent for me by this time. But he is merciful, and they are probably sleeping."

Vanderveer glances at Benonski, who with alert senses has taken in this interview with astonishment equal to Vanderveer's at the feat he has observed.

"Benonski will be allowed to go along with us," says Vanderveer, still plotting for time.

"I see no objection."

"Just a moment, Mr. Waters. You struck me last night, and to-day you decline my challenge. But I am not to be put off so. I have another offer. Benonski will draw the charge in one weapon, and leave the other loaded. He shall then place them under _____"

"Restrain your bloodthirsty intentions, Mr. Vanderveer. I shall not fire at you; I shall not stand for you to fire at me. I am charged with the duty of taking two important prisoners to New York, and nothing whatever shall turn me from the course of my duty. If you respect your word, which you gave me last night, you will offer no violent resistance of any kind to that procedure. Accompany me if you care to. The train leaves in three-quarters of an hour."

"What course will matters take when they reach New York?"

"They will be indicted."

"And imprisoned to await trial?"

"Yes."

"That delicate woman! Think, man—think what you do."

"You are prejudiced in her interests, Mr. Vanderveer. In the eyes of the law she is charged with murder. He is charged as an accessory."

"A conspiracy from hell! Do you credit that atrocious charge?"

"I? What have I to do with it? If I disbelieved it, that would not influence juries, I imagine."

"But it might cause you to forget that you are an officer of justice. It might lead you to remember that a woman's life, an innocent, a noble woman's life, is a greater thing than the bungling and heartless abstraction that men misname justice. If you believed her innocent, you would not be a party to the infamous oppression of adverse circumstances that make her appear guilty."

"Why not—if I am a devil?"

Vanderveer bites his lip. This sharp, keen-toned

man, flinging back at him the reminder of his own epithets, is more than his equal in retort. He represses his feelings, however, and continues to play his policy of delay. He is not hoping to move Waters, but to gain time.

"I may have spoken too bitterly," he says. "You could easily disprove the aptness of my epithet. If these prisoners of yours are innocent—reflect what responsibility you——"

"We do not always execute our own responsibilities. I merely execute the law. You are not so simple, I suppose, as to think to turn me from the course of my duty by your appeals."

"Why not? It is to be looking out of the car window—the scenery you say is so fresh this morning. When you look around again, the prisoners have disappeared."

Waters laughs.

"Let us go and inform them what a precious fine program you have concocted, Mr. Vanderveer," he remarks, half scornfully. "Your strategy is admirable. When I gaze from the car window—certainly. A charming arrangement. It would so finely commend me at headquarters, where we are specially charged with the importance of the case and the necessity of care in its execution."

He strides out of the room, followed by Vanderveer, toward the apartment where the prisoners are.

"Mr. Godby is a trifle too gentle-hearted, Martin," remarks Waters, as they reach the landing. "He is doubtless permitting the lady to sleep until the last moment. But he should not risk making us late."

Then he raps upon the chamber door.

No answer!

He raps again, and louder. Then, without waiting for results, he sets his shoulder against the door, and with a powerful push breaks it open with a crash.

"Godby! Godby!" he cries.

Then, in evident astonishment, he springs forward.

CHAPTER V.

"YOU HAVE HUNTED THEM TO THEIR DEATH."

Godby sits fast bound in his chair, in such a position that he is evidently unable to move. There is a bandage over his mouth. This Waters tears off with a savage movement, crying, in a terrible voice:

"Where are your prisoners, you wretch?"

"Gone!" answers Godby, with a groan of despair.

Turning sharply to Martin, Waters commands:

"Search the house! Search outside for their tracks and direction! They must not escape!"

Then, facing Vanderveer, he adds, fiercely:

"This is your work, I fancy."

The Russian laughs at this, and Vanderveer replies:

"And perhaps you expect me to assist you in the pursuit. On the whole this is better, so far, than the car window scheme. Do you not think so? Pity you did not get here earlier, now. I fear you were detained by our little interview. But I was well pleased to observe the fine morning effects which you pointed out."

"Oh! So! You were gaining time, then. I see the game! But they will be taken before the day is gone. It will be impossible for them to elude our pursuit. You have mud on your shoes, Mr. Vanderveer—now I happen to observe. That means that you were outside last night."

"There is no law against going out in a storm—for a good purpose, I believe," replies Vanderveer, coolly.

"If I thought it good policy I would put you under arrest. As it is, you will be so good as to leave this room while I investigate a little. I would like to ascertain the circumstances of their escape."

As Vanderveer and Benonski withdraw, Waters, with an ominous glitter in his eyes, walks over to the chair where Godby still sits bound.

"Well, Godby!"

The man hangs his head but does not reply.

"Tell me what you got for this. It is worth a good round price."

"What do you mean?"

"It was cash down, I suppose. A thousand dollars at least—perhaps five thousand. Carrington is rich. I judge you could make your own terms."

"I don't understand you," stammers Godby, not in the least daring to meet the steely eyes of his superior.

"You lie, Godby!"

Godby cowers visibly.

"Why do you not get up, you wretch?"

"They have tied me to the chair, haven't they?"

"Oh, very well! Sit there a little, then, and let me see how well you can lie. Who tied you, Mr. Godby?"

"Carrington—he and the woman."

"Very likely story, indeed! You, of course, resisted stoutly."

"Not with his revolver in my ear. They would have killed me like a rat. I was taken off my guard."

"Yes—you would have been killed—if you had not been bribed, I see! Cursed traitor! Do you think to deceive me? Carrington's money is in your pocket now. Bah! Call that a knot? Here! Slip out that hand. Idiot! You are not tied enough to hold a pet lamb. And you sit there for hours without giving the alarm," sneers Waters, tearing off the cords from Godby, without undoing a knot.

"When my reports go in I will endeavor to remember this," he hisses, with a savage glare into Godby's face. "What time did they leave this room?"

"About two o'clock."

Godby is now shivering with terror. He has not sufficiently reckoned upon the terrible wrath of his chief. But he plucks up courage enough to say:

"I'll have my own story to tell, too. They had me covered with a revolver—that's the truth. You can't prove any bribery, I say—and there wasn't any."

"I will deal with you later, sir. The first thing now is to repair the mischief you have caused. We must get on the trail and find the game. And it will not be so easy. Carrington is no fool, and knows how to cover his tracks. Have you any clues?"

"You don't suppose they unfolded their plans to me, do you?"

Waters makes no answer, but begins casting his eyes about the room. Presently upon the center table he sees a bunch of scarlet pinks. He places himself where Godby, behind him, can see nothing, and then he swoops down upon them with his hand. He has seen them before—in the parlors, but last night, where they rose and fell with her voluptuous breath, as they rested on her incomparable breast. He carries the withering flowers greedily to his lips, and holds them there for a second. Then he thrusts them into the folds of his coat. As Godby approaches he begins examining some loose paper on the table, saying sharply:

"You will stay here and watch for a short time. Our best clue, if they are not found to-day, will be to keep an eye on this fine Mr. Vanderveer. He knows more than he will tell."

"I hope you will not be too severe on me, Mr. Waters. I am prepared to show that I was coerced by fear of my life, and——"

"No more of that, if you please," interrupts Waters. "I advise you now to do what you can to remedy your infernal treachery."

At this moment there are heavy steps upon the stairs and Martin, accompanied by a stranger in the garb of a boatman or sailor rushes in, gasping: "I have news."

"Ah! You have found a trace, I hope," cries Waters, joyously.

As Martin turns to reply, his eye rests upon Vanderveer, who has quickly followed. Looking at him fixedly, he hesitates a moment, then demands, in a trembling voice:

"She was to have been your wife, sir—am I right?"

"Tell your news," commands Waters, catching with his fine intuitions the awe in Martin's voice.

"This boatman," goes on Martin, still in a low tone, "says there is a small yacht ashore. They were escaping, most probably, in a yacht."

"And they are drowned, you mean?" puts in Godby from behind.

"If they were on that yacht—yes."

"My God!"

It is Vanderveer, white in the face, who utters

this exclamation, while he stares first at Martin, and then at the sailor.

"Wait!" cries John Waters, in a hard, horrified tone. "Vanderveer, you know whether they were escaping in that yacht. You know, therefore, whether the sea has claimed them, and not the law."

He stands and glares at Vanderveer. He feels against his heart that instant the pressure of the pinks, and even fancies that their odor creeps out to his senses.

For the first time in Vanderveer's sight, this man of iron betrays emotion. Is it an expression of agony?

"Lead us to the place where the yacht is," cries Harris, and all together, they rush down to the beach.

The sun has broken out from the bank of mist that still clings kissingly to the seaward horizon. The deepening surge of the spent tempest is churning and crashing, in gigantic and billowing shapes against the sand, that hurls back its flying spray in a coast line of milky yeast as far as eye can follow either way. And these titan surges, in their wild play, have hurled upon the sands the broken hull of a white yacht, battered and wrecked—a yacht that the evening before had lain peacefully in the inlet below the lawn of the Graystone house. The wrecked craft, thrown up, almost torn asunder at her beams, has now been forsaken by a receding tide. Her broken mast and twisted sail still swing from her bows.

Vanderveer knows her instantly—so does John Waters.

They stop together, by a sudden common impulse, and stare in silence at the ruined prey of the sea. Then they look with slow horror in each other's eyes.

"It is now useless to conceal anything," says Waters, in a hard, cold voice. "You and Benonski put them on this boat. You trusted them to this demoniac ocean. They have died as a consequence of your recklessness."

"Never! They were not to put to sea at all. Of course not! It would be madness without excuse, to do so in such a sea as this. It was a very devil's tempest. They were but to cross the small bay—a

voyage as safe as heaven. I see it all. They were driven out by some accident, lost their bearings in the darkness. The tide sets out like a mill race near the narrows. Once in it, they could not escape. *Yes, you devil from hell! And you! you, sir, have hunted them to their death! Are you now satisfied?* ”

“ Let us search. I think I see something up the beach,” interposes Martin, pointing far up the shore, where there is a patch of color in the sunshine, almost indistinguishable in the distance. The whole party again rush off to discover what it may be, Vanderveer, winged with his growing horror, outstripping them all.

A cloak, with a red lining, half buried under the drenched sands—this is what they find.

“ It is Brauna’s. Oh, my God!” says the despairing lover.

He drags it from the sand, and holding it before him, looks on it in dumb agony.

“ *You have done this!* ” he cries, turning again upon Waters. “ Your life and nothing less shall atone for it.”

“ You would find no comfort in killing me, Mr. Vanderveer, and I should go to any lengths to avoid killing you. Life with me is not so cheap as it seems to be with you. You may some time discover that you have formed wrong impressions of me and of the facts. Right or wrong, nothing would be gained by a new tragedy.”

With this he turns away, leaving Harris Vanderveer, now almost helpless in his grief, supported by Benonski.

CHAPTER VI.

“ I AM JEALOUS OF THE SEA.”

After some weeks have passed, Benonski, with faithful care of his master’s interests, secures a tenant for Graystone, and arranges with various banks to hold their deposits for a year, subject to future action in

probate, and the remainder of Carrington's business relations he adjusts as they develop with painstaking care and excellent judgment.

"It may not be—it may not be," over and over again he says to himself and to Vanderveer. "They may not have perished, notwithstanding the wrecked yacht."

But the mourning lover only shakes his head.

"They were in it. They went to the bottom of the sea," he says. "Oh, that awful night!"

For days—weeks even, he haunts the shore, and watches for the sea to fling his treasure at his feet. He inspects every account of the wrecks of that night, and of bodies of the dead cast up by the sea—all in vain. They came no more to his vision, and the ocean, calmed to a glassy surface in the sunlight and moonlight, keeps its dread secret, while it splashes on him its playful spray, moaning all night in his ears a requiem for his dead.

The story of the arrest never circulated among his friends, nor among the little circle where Brauna had moved. When New York heard that she and her father had been swept to sea while attempting to cross the little bay, and doubtless wrecked and drowned in the gale, there was for a few weeks a decent consternation in the world of society where she had moved, and some sincere and mournful sympathy for Vanderveer. Human nature is at its best in its comfort for the sorrowing, and Harris Vanderveer was a favorite.

About three months after this, Count St. Mart Golfi, a Russian refugee of famous skill and daring, and a remarkable history, sits alone in a secret chamber in the rear of a house in Jane Street.

This building is now the actual center of the Moscow League in New York. It has a secret entrance, made with much quiet labor, from an adjoining house in Horatio Street; likewise one or two panel chambers and a padded room deep down in the sub-cellar. Concealed under the floor of one of its apartments is enough melinite to shatter a goodly portion of the neighborhood. One of its principal rooms is pro-

vided with a trapped floor that might suddenly open under the feet and project the doomed one to God knows whither; no one has ever returned to tell.

The nefarious nature of this house of quiet exterior in this half-forgotten portion of New York is absolutely unsuspected by the police. If it were suspected, Golfi's influence is probably near enough to the corrupt political centers of city authority to enable him to guard his headquarters against inspection, not to say invasion, by any who might seek to unearth its secrets.

St. Mart Golfi sits alone in an upper room of this house examining a book of reports. As he reads, his face is contracted into a deep frown. The frowning face is one expressing great power. The brows are black and shaggy, beetling over the eyes, that glitter like beads of jet beneath them, and his heavy jaws are like those of a sullen bulldog. He is heavily, even massively built, yet he is the lithest and quickest man that ever leaped over the iron guard around the prison at Petrofski.

This man it is who in New York controls the Moscow League, the most daring and influential organization of Nihilists in or out of Russia. Their plots reach to the palace of the Czar, and when he fell at last in death, his blood stained the Moscow League. The Moscow League struck government in the face, and also in the back. They smote in front in St. Petersburg, and behind in Siberia. They are masters in the use of the dagger, the poison, and the explosive. Life to them is cheap, especially their own. If it is dear at all, it is dear because they want to accomplish revolution in Russia. If they can not do this, they will strike the tyrants who maintain Siberia for their torture, and suppress the soul of man in the interests of the hated class. They believe that if they fail, their children after them will succeed. And if hope is gone, revenge still remains.

For the safety of their plans, and to furnish a refuge to the Nihilists who might escape from Siberia, they have planted their seat in America. Golfi the terrible, who has suffered under the knout of a Siberian gov-

error, that punishment that so often ends in death, has recovered and lives. He has left blood in his track. The governor himself by whose order he was scourged was found in the prison yard by the horrified guard minus his eyes, minus his tongue, all his fingers gone, evidently torn off, groaning and dying. The night guard have been slain with their own bullets. Golfi and twenty others, with food for ten days, lost themselves in the winter, in the Siberian mountains, striking for the region of Bering Straits. Every man but Golfi succumbed under the horrors of Siberian frosts. Golfi the superhuman, Golfi the unconquerable, foraging on the wretched hut dwellers, burrowing in snow drifts, without food for days, intrepid, tireless, dreadful in misfortune, reached the ocean, stole a boat, impressed a terrified Kamchatkan into his service, braved the wave and the ice, and reached the American shore.

When he had suffered enough, God gave him a quick and easy passage on a whale ship to San Francisco, and thence overland to New York. Here he finds other refugees, and to him they all turn for leadership.

And being here, this man has one great consuming purpose of a personal nature, and another patriotic purpose. The purpose of Golfi, the patriot, is the death of the tyrant in St. Petersburg. But the vehement intent of Golfi, the Siberian sufferer, is nearer and more deadly. He believes that the earth is still vexed with the footsteps of the man who betrayed into the hands of the Czar one day himself and a hundred others to be sent to the prison and the knout. While this traitor lives Golfi will never sleep easily in his bed, will never cease to scowl and search and plot. It is but a short time since he has heard that this traitor, attempting to escape, has perished in the sea.

Count St. Mart lifts his eyes from the reports. There is a glint of morning sunshine smiting the window pane behind him, falling on his face—a majestic and terrible face, with its scars and scowls, lighted thus with the morning sun.

He touches a bell and waits. A minute later his alert ear catches the sound of soft footsteps, and al-

most noiselessly a man enters the apartment—a thin, yellow individual, in a long black coat.

"Sit down, baron," says Golfi, in a voice surprisingly mellow and musical.

The visitor sits on the extreme edge of the chair.

"Do not fear the chair, baron," he laughs. "It has no devils in its bowels."

The baron, in a somewhat sickly fashion, tries to laugh also.

"I wish to refresh my memory—to use yours a little, my friend," begins Golfi. "You remember the attempt to kidnap Pordanoff?"

"The Czar's spy?"

"Yes."

"He escaped."

"Yes."

"Tell me who was in charge?"

"Gunst. He was punished. I assisted in his punishment."

"Who was over him?"

"Waters—Number 66."

"I thought so. He made the charge against Gunst, I think?"

"Yes. He is never——"

"Reserve your comments. Tell me who was selected to do Modjeska, the Polish traitor, who is now in the Czar's army?"

"Nolitas—Number 18."

"Who was it set the trap?"

"Waters and his squad."

"Why did they fail?"

"The men went to the wrong place. Waters reported, and they confessed the mistake."

"There are twenty-three cases reported here, all under Waters's charge. Of these, nineteen meant death. In eighteen of them the marked man escaped us."

"Incredible."

"I go by the record. It is true—like most incredible things. These records cover over two hundred cases. We have struck with no uncertain hand. Outside the cases given to Waters, there are but three escapes."

"And he the ablest man in the League. He is not at fault, you may be sure."

Count St. Mart Golfi smiles.

"In every instance I find the guilt was clearly traced to his men, or to some of them."

"Ah, I believed it to be so. You should give him the most trustworthy men. He is certain to retrieve that record. His reputation is that of a man of iron."

"If he is playing me false, I shall show you how steel can grind iron to powder. His last case is the worst."

"But they are dead."

"It is not enough. I am jealous of the sea. I wished to see that traitor in the torture room. I do not forget five years in Siberia easily."

"Godby is not a Russian. You should send only Russians in cases as important as that."

"Yes; you are right. Godby is not in the inner circle, but he may be true to the cause. I find that he was covered with a weapon, and would only have risked his own life had he resisted. The fault lies higher. It looks not a little strange that but one man was set on guard over a man like Alvaroff. Bah! Godby is a toad. Why did Waters put him in there alone? True, Waters could not know that Alvaroff was the ablest plotter in Moscow, and a man to be guarded with sleepless vigilance. I ought to have posted him. Twice this traitor has escaped. He is dead—and I am sorry. Ah! Had I but been able to put my hands to his throat but once before he——Bah! Merely to drown! It angers me."

Golfi stamps his foot on the floor, and shows his large white teeth like the snarling fangs of a beast of prey.

"These reports," he continues, "have aroused a suspicion. Tell me again the story of the arrest."

"A suspicion?"

"Yes. That they may yet be alive."

"That is impossible, count. At your orders the entire affair was investigated by me. They were in the yacht. The yacht was upset and swept ashore. Her cloak was found on the beach. They are dead."

"And my vengeance on that viper will never be wrought."

"Yet we who suffer have other work to do. St. Petersburg exists—palace and throne. We have not been left without a mission."

At this instant an electric bell near at hand begins ringing. Golfi hears it through. There are long thrills and short ones, with long and short pauses also.

"There is a messenger waiting—important," says Golfi, then commands, "Remain in the next room. I may desire to see you farther."

The baron has hardly disappeared when through another entrance noiselessly comes in a being one might call a human cat. In every look and movement he is catlike. His eyes are those of the feline, his teeth like a tiger's, his tread like the measured pace of the beast advancing on its prey. On his face is a wide star-shaped scar, that might either have been thought a birthmark or a saber cut. Of thick set and powerful build, with long arms and wide, brawny hands, he seems more animal than human.

As he enters the count rises up and looks at him without speaking.

"You are Count St. Mart Golfi, formerly of Moscow," says the stranger, bowing and removing his cap.

Golfi, silent and watchful, bows in return his assent.

"If you will permit me to be seated—I have an important matter to communicate."

"Sit there, if you please."

The count designates a large armchair near the table. He knows that the entrance of this man means that he has passed a good examination at various entrance ways, and has been able to satisfy the guards that he is a good Nihilist. Taking the chair without suspicion, the visitor remarks, abruptly:

"I am a companion in misfortune—and in liberty. I, too, am from Moscow. I am able to identify myself to all good Nihilists."

He thereupon makes a signal with his hands.

"A friend and brother," says Golfi. "How can I serve you?"

"I wish to ascertain why you and our brotherhood marked Alvaroff for death."

"What have you to do with Alvaroff?" asks Golfi, eyeing him closely.

"Much, Count Golfi. In fact, his death—— He was drowned, was he not?"

"He and his daughter."

"They were arrested?"

"Yes."

"By your orders?"

"Through my influence."

"You hunted them down? You had a reason for bringing them to account."

"He was arrested for being concerned in a murder—perhaps you know that also. It was a public matter, more or less."

"I know something of that. But the League does not concern itself with the apprehending of criminals who are merely charged with private and personal crimes. Why did we follow Alvaroff?"

"I have no objection to telling, especially as the case is ended. Alvaroff was the traitor who betrayed the conspiracy of 1874. That year a hundred patriots went to Siberia—I among them. Twenty were knouted. I alone of the number survived that punishment. Perhaps you know all this?"

"Count St. Mart Golfi's history is written on the heart of every brother of the Moscow League. But it is difficult to believe all that you say. Pardon me—Alvaroff was accused—but the proofs were defective."

"Why defend him? He and Merki fled one day before the arrests at the Bouski Plaza, where of all the patriots assembled not ten escaped. Waters, the American, was one. He shot the guards of the Czar in their tracks, I am told. Alvaroff and Merki were proved to have received a high officer of the court at Alvaroff's house. That house was surrounded by guards for two days before the affair at the Bouski Plaza. How did they escape, except by the connivance of the Czar's officers? It was the price of their betrayal. Alvaroff and his daughter gathered up and took with them about all of his great wealth. What more by way of proof is needed?"

"Nevertheless Merki, whatever is proved of Alvar-

off, was not a traitor. He also was at the Bouski Plaza. He stood beside Waters, and cut his way through. Why accuse Merki?"

"It was a slip of memory. I withdraw that. It is true that Merki was at the Bouski Plaza, at least, that accords with my information. I made the charge because he was the intimate of Alvaroff's beautiful daughter, by whom he was at length stilettoed in this city. No; Merki was probably unaware, though infatuated by the girl, of Alvaroff's intended treachery. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why he did not escape with them."

"I am relieved to hear you exonerate Merki."

"You knew him?"

"Very well."

"You knew then, perhaps, about his murder by Alvaroff's daughter?"

"No; he was not murdered by Alvaroff's daughter."

"In this city, seven years ago, in a house since burned down, she stabbed him three times with her stiletto—stabbed him to death."

"Not so. He did not die."

"The proofs are on the coroner's records."

"Nevertheless, Ferrand Merki still lives."

"You are in error. Let us dismiss the topic. Your delusion is unpleasant."

"I will then prove to you that it is no delusion. I ought to know, Count Golfi. I myself am Ferrand Merki."

CHAPTER VII.

"ARE YOU SATISFIED, COUNT GOLFI?"

St. Mart fixes his piercing eyes on the catlike face of his visitor, who has just made this startling announcement, and says, in a deep, threatening tone:

"Then, Ferrand Merki, you have not a minute to live. You shall die the sudden, dreadful death of a traitor!"

If the count has expected his visitor to quail and cower at this threat, he is disappointed. Only a sly

hand creeps inside his cloak, until Golfi says, sharply:

"Weapons will not avail you. Observe my hand, resting on this paper weight. If I press it, a dozen blades, each with force enough to penetrate your heart, and poison enough to kill as many men, will impale you before you can move."

"Wait a moment," says the cat, his face shading to the gray of ashes, but still boldly meeting the count's terrible eyes. "Wait! I have information too valuable to make it profitable to you to press the paper weight. Besides, if you did, your knives would not so much as prick my skin. They would stop short of the barrier made for me by Wasti, the finest craftsman in the world—Wasti, of Moscow. You know what that means."

"Oh! You have on one of Wasti's steel shirts—yes, I know very well. It is made of links as fine as hair, and wears as flexibly as wool. But that avails nothing. Note the scarlet cord here at my touch. If I but pull it enough to lift the weight of a pin, you will lie the next instant, crushed under four tons of iron, dropped from a distance of twelve feet above your head. I will not dally. I am about to pull the cord, and end the career of a traitor."

"I am no traitor, Count Golfi. I am a patriot."

"You shall live long enough to fail in an attempt to prove it. But if you move, or lift a hand, it shall be the signal for your instant destruction. Why were the officers at Alvaroff's house?"

"If they were there, as you affirm, and as I am unable to disprove, then Alvaroff was a traitor."

"You loved Alvaroff's beautiful daughter?"

"All men love her. If I did, no one need condemn that. At all events, I wished to marry Alvaroff's daughter."

"There was a marriage. You were in his confidence. You were traitors together."

"Before I feel four tons of death on my head," says the cat, now cool and watchful, glancing upward at the square frescoes in the ceiling over his chair, "permit me to tell my story. Alvaroff, as you know, was immensely rich, I was wretchedly poor. Nihilists should

have learned not to trust a rich man. Ever are they on the side of government. Their interests are always with the established order. Alvaroff was rich and I poor. Brauna, his daughter, was the most beautiful girl in Moscow—in Russia. She fell passionately in love with me.”

“There is no accounting for tastes,” says Golfi, grimly.

“She loved me, let that suffice. I was dazzled by the hope of a great fortune as well as by her great beauty. I married her.”

“With Alvaroff’s consent?”

“Yes.”

“Then you were his ally in treachery.”

“Not so. Together we lied to Alvaroff. He was made to believe that his daughter’s fair name was menaced, and he formed a devil’s plot to be rid of me. He fled the very evening after the marriage in the morning, taking his daughter with him, and the next day occurred the affair at the Bouski Plaza.”

“Your romance is pleasing. It gives me insight into your intentions. I can now guess why you propose to personate Ferrand Merki.”

“I am Ferrand Merki.”

“I compliment you. It is well done—but the evidence defeats you. You are fortunate, because as you are merely a fraud, I shall be content to postpone or even forego the pulling of this little cord while you sit under the death weight. Ferrand Merki is long ago dead. But if you should lay claim to the vast fortune of Alvaroff, as the husband of his daughter, with a goodly array of fraudulent proofs—well, there seems to be nobody left to resist you. It will be a fine speculation.”

“That indeed would be a powerful motive to an impostor, Count Golfi. But the claim would be invincible if I am Ferrand Merki himself.”

“That is easily tested. Show yourself to your old associates. I never knew you in Moscow. Waters did. Shall I send for Waters?”

“In due time. Where is Baron de Lani? He will tell you if I lie.”

Count Golfi touches a bell, and then calls out in a loud tone, to the astonishment of the cat:

"Baron de Lani! This way, please."

The man in the long coat and sallow face, who had been with the count at the moment of the arrival of the cat, now reappears from an inner room. Astonished at this unexpectedly prompt response to his challenge the man who has called himself Ferrand Merki stands up to meet the issue he has invited. Following Golfi's look, he turns sharply about and faces the man coming in, and in a firm, harsh, defiant tone, says, audaciously:

"Good morning, Baron de Lani; greeting from an old acquaintance."

De Lani looks, then stares, then gasps, then puts up his hand with an expression of vast horror in his eyes, and retreats along the wall with a face turning as white as the frescoes against which it is set.

"Merki!" he gasps at last. "The phantom—of—Ferrand Merki!"

"Is this man Ferrand Merki—supposed to have been murdered by Alvaroff's daughter years ago? Speak, De Lani."

Golfi, standing up, looks from one to the other in growing astonishment.

"It is Merki," says the baron, his teeth chattering. "It is he—or his double—or his ghost. No—impossible! I saw him at the coroner's, dead. It is impossible!"

"Are you satisfied, Count Golfi?" says the cat, with a little laugh.

"No. De Lani, this man professes to be Ferrand Merki. You have detected a resemblance, that is all. Tell me, on second thought, is this the man?"

"He has the scar, count. He has the eyes. He has the yellow teeth—the long arms. My God! He is risen from the dead, then."

"Let us consider it," says the count, sitting down again. "Let us for the moment assume it, since the baron seems to have recognized you. Tell me, then, how you come to be here alive. Tell me who was killed in the house in Waverley Place."

He motions Merki to a seat also, and waits for his explanation.

"A she-devil indeed stabbed me with her stiletto three times in the back. I was dead. I am still legally dead. Pest! You shall see the scars that she made."

He flings off his coat, and with a few movements, bares to the count's view a portion of the skin surface of his back. The count and De Lani come near and inspect the skin. Three heavy scars, small, but well defined, are visible there.

"The scars are there. You are doing well with the proofs. Go on," says Golfi.

The cat resumes his attire, covering the scars again with a cunning smile of triumph on his face.

"The infallible physicians even do not know how much life there is in a man," he resumes. "The coroner declared me dead. Ostensibly, I was buried. As a matter of fact, the ghastly body took the common course. It is the ordinary practice to bury dummies from the public morgue. They are only buried when they can not be sold—the real body, I mean. It was so with the body of the murdered man, Ferrand Merki. It was sold to some medical students. Before they came to take it away it returned to life. I found myself lying in the coroner's room."

"I knew, with returning consciousness, where I was and what must have happened after I felt her daggers in my back. It was night. I, who have suffered too, Count Golfi, have a strong will. I found in the coroner's room brandy and food. My wounds were dangerous. Nevertheless, I crawled out of that place, leaving the door unlocked behind me, carrying with me a bottle of brandy and a roll of bread. I remained three days in the stable, hidden in the straw. I had little fever, notwithstanding my wounds. I managed to steal some garments to cover my naked body. Thus, carefully, I escaped. I was sick for a year. I still suffer from the wounds. Whenever the wind is to the east and the air is raw, I am forced by my pain to remember the stiletto of Brauna Alvaroff and the treachery of her father."

"Where have you been since recovering?"

"In Russia."

"Why did you leave New York?"

"Alvaroff and his daughter—my wife, disappeared. The police lost the clue. They might be in Russia. I also had word that my good father had returned on a pardon from Siberia. I went to him that I might cheer his declining days."

"De Lani, what do you say of this story?" asks Golfi, turning to the baron.

"It is true. This can be none other than Ferrand Merki, whom we all believed to be dead. It is marvelous."

"If you are able to prove this story, then you may claim Alvaroff's fortune."

"Not so, count. I intend to seize a far better thing."

"Better?"

"Yes, I shall seize the heir of Alvaroff."

"He had but one heir—heiress, rather. She is dead."

The cat looks slowly from the count to the baron, and then from the baron to the count. "Alvaroff and his daughter are neither of them dead. They both live."

Golfi and De Lani only stare at this strange man, startled at his astonishing announcement. The count speaks first:

"Now may all good devils prove you true. Then I may yet put my hands upon a traitor's throat and sponge out the horrors of Siberia. Tell me what you know."

He takes a menacing step nearer to Merki, as if he would seize him and wrest his secrets from him by force.

"Have patience, Count Golfi. Did not I before say to you that my information is too valuable to be buried under your infernal death traps? I shall account it an honor to serve the great Count St. Mart Golfi as an ally and a friend, especially as I too am bound by the blood oath of our suffering brotherhood."

"Proceed, then," commands St. Mart, a little impatiently. "And be careful that my oath does not require me to destroy you as a traitor."

"If I were a traitor, think you I would come to this place with my information? Am I that simple, think you?"

The cat pauses, a glitter in his eyes, watching narrowly the jaws of the bulldog, for it is now a match between these two not very unequal in cunning, skill, and power. Golfi, astonished at what Merki has revealed, yet only half believing him, is thinking rapidly how he may perhaps pierce the possible lie that has been sprung upon him. At the same time he is considering whether Merki may not be actually telling the truth. If so, then Golfi desires to penetrate his motives and uncover his intentions. On his part, Merki is armed so well with startling information that he believes himself to be for the present master of the situation.

"You are the husband of Alvaroff's daughter. If they live, as you have asserted, you then are his ally—and hers. Alvaroff is dead. He and his daughter lie forever under the billows of the sea. Ferrand Merki you may be—in spite of the baron's identification, and the scars, and all, I am skeptical about that but Alvaroff is dead. Tell me your motive for your falsehood about Alvaroff?"

"Alvaroff lives, his daughter lives. I know it. I discovered it entirely by a lucky accident. Had I not, I never should have come here to-day. How they managed to escape and elude you all I know as little as you. But in less than a day I can take you to the place where at this moment they are hiding."

Golfi reflects an instant. The manner of this man impresses him. It is indeed the cunning manner of a plotter, yet to Golfi it says that Merki is telling the truth. He looks at him again as if he would read the most hidden secrets of his heart.

"You are telling the truth," he says, in a tone of mingled exultation and warning. "You would not dare tell me that if it were not true. Now I wish to know why you come here to tell it to me, and what you wish to propose. Are you not the lawful husband of Alvaroff's daughter?"

"Ask Baron de Lani to retire. To you, and to you alone, will I reveal my motive."

"The baron will remain in the inner room," says Golfi, waving his hand to De Lani with an imperious gesture. "And, baron, you will make known to no one what has passed between us in your presence. Listen for the bell."

De Lani bows himself out.

"And now," begins Golfi, "be careful what you say—ghost of Ferrand Merki. Say it clearly, and be sure I shall note and remember. Why have you come here to tell me that the traitor lives?"

"Pest! Why should I lie to you, think you? Especially, why should I come here and thrust my head into the jaws of devils, in order to lie? Why do I not ally myself with Alvaroff?"

"It is that question I am waiting for you to answer."

"It answers itself. Did not Alvaroff hate me? Pest! She stabbed me until she believed I was dead. Her father had convinced her that it was I and not himself that led the Czar's officers to the Bouski Plaza. I have three scars in my back where this tigress struck me with her claws. Very well. Think you I love her for that? The dagger devil! Bah! I hate them both! But I have my plans, Count Golfi, I have my plans. Stupid! Shall I go to them and say: 'I am alive?' What will be the result? She can no longer be hunted for my murder. She is free. Then her hatred will boil over. Alvaroff will come here and try to show you, and succeed if he can, that I, and not he, am the traitor. They will have the marriage annulled. That done, and I shall never see a ruble of Alvaroff's fortune! That is plain, is it not?"

Golfi, silent, alert, and with eyes fixed on the speaker, makes no answer, but signs him to proceed. Merki accordingly continues:

"But I come to you. You also hate Alvaroff. You believe him to be the cause of your sufferings—of Siberia and the knout. I know not. If he were that traitor, you know best. If he were that traitor, then should he not die? When they are both dead, I, and I alone, can seize the fortune of Alvaroff. As I am the husband of his daughter, and can prove it, I

am the sole heir. Therefore, I wish them both to die. Had I been here when they were arrested they would not have escaped *me*."

Merki wipes his face with a handkerchief, and then sits down—not in the same chair, however.

"So far the case is clear," says Golfi. "Have you told it all?"

"No. I have the coroner who sat at the inquest, and he will do what I bid him. If Brauna should be put on trial he will not be seen. His records will show the death. There are also the interment records. But when I come, as I shall, to claim the fortune of Alvaroff, the coroner will testify that the body disappeared. The medical students who were to have taken it away at midnight and did not find it are also in this city, and they will be on hand at that time to add their testimony. I shall be able to trace my own trail indisputably for every hour since I entered the St. Mary Hospital with the wounds in my back."

"I see the game clearly. You wish to remain concealed. You declare that Alvaroff and his daughter, who is also your legal wife, are alive. You wish them dead. Good! If you tell the truth, Ferrand Merki-risen-from-the-dead, then what you wish and what I wish are the same. Where is Alvaroff?"

"On the eastern end of Long Island."

"Who protects them? How did they escape? There is something underneath all that, important for me to know. I allow myself all the chance of being deceived, but our interests are the same, and I forgive even a plausible fraud, and all things else, if you but show me Alvaroff and his daughter alive. What are your plans?"

"The woman is sick. She may even die. There was, I think, some dreadful exposure during their escape. If she recovers, the law will take its course. It is for you, Count Golfi, in secret, and in the use of all the power of our brotherhood, to stand behind the law, and push on its terrors. Let her suffer the shame of the courts, of jails—even of execution."

"Bah! That is foolish. No jury in New York would convict. No judge would give a death sen-

tence, if they did. Money and sentiment would save her. If she dies it will be of shame and fear. I saw her once, before the arrest. She is inordinately beautiful; she is also refined and sensitive."

"True—and all the better for us, who mean to kill her. And all the more will I be able to punish her."

"True. You, Merki, have suffered—so have I, but we can not bring her to a legal death in New York. But through her shame, the traitor can be tortured. It is better than to strike him. By all means drag her into the courts. We can be there, and no soul know that we are the power behind. Let his heart wring out its traitor's blood drop by drop. If she, at last, survives, it will be as a prisoner of the State, without hope and without a future. Then if you seek her fortune, it is for you to see to it."

"She shall die. Pest! My dagger wounds will sting in my back until the she-devil is out of the world. Besides—the money, Count Golfi, the money!"

"We will let them both go to the mercy of the law first. If they survive it, then I will find a very good way to bring that traitor to his doom. He shall listen to my story of Siberia, and then he shall know what its tortures are, know by the agony of his own. My God! Let me remember the knout, the frosts, the starvation in the Kamtchatkan deserts! To him, to him, I owe it all."

Golfi, remembering his sufferings, rises from his chair with a contortion of rage in his face.

"The first thing is to seize them," says Merki, with a glitter in his eyes.

"Show me their hiding place. They shall not escape me again," replies Count St. Mart. Then, renewing his study for a moment of the face of the visitor, he continues, in an uneasy way: "If you should betray me, Ferrand Merki, you yourself shall go to the torture chamber."

"It will be a long day first. I was never made for the thumbscrews."

"Who can tell? I was educated to be a priest of the Greek Church. You see how the intentions of men fare. You may even yet come to the thumbscrews."

"I am not desirous to anticipate it. Are we to be allies?"

"Yes. For the present we must work together."

"For the destruction of our enemies."

"Yes. To repay the knout."

"Ah! And to seize a million dollars."

"To punish a traitor."

"Precisely; and to requite for three dagger thrusts in my back."

The men clasp hands. Two fools are they, living for the basest of ends—revenge and greed.

But the compact of vengeance is closed and sealed.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WILL MARRY HIM."

Harris Vanderveer, rich, handsome, educated, can not be spared from his fine coterie of friends and admirers, to nurse his grief for a woman who has been so unfortunate as to be drowned. His melancholy is interesting. It adds to the romantic charm of his personality. And a man of his temperament is very readily susceptible to the flattery of a delicate sympathy. For this reason he finds solace and delight in the companionship of Blanche Evanston. With subtle art she talks with him, at first chiefly of the tragedy and of its victims. This keeps him by her side, and in her atmosphere there is the inexplicable charm of an intoxicating sensuousness to which a man like Vanderveer is easily inclined to yield.

Blanche is a society phenomenon. No one can tell her history. No one seems to know, if there should be inquiry, how she came into her position. She keeps sumptuous apartments, with some elderly female who passes as her aunt; is a charming hostess, and always an entertaining and attractive guest. If some mammas shrug their shoulders in private they can not afford to snub in public such a popular doll-faced beauty, so frank and childlike and artless, but also evi-

dently rich and elegant and composed and witty and agreeable enough to get herself liked by all the desirable men in the circle in which she moves.

Vanderveer does not care to resist in the least her delicious siege of his heart, of which he is not definitely aware, of course, but which she pursues as persistently and insidiously as good form and fine art will permit. He hardly could have known that in two months she would become nearly indispensable to him. Brauna was gone forever; why should he not feel the comfort which the presence of this rare creature gives him, and so he drifts along, utterly unconscious of the secret motives that make this fair, sensuous plotter burn to hasten his slow descent to the pitfall that she is laying for him.

There are possible volcanoes under her feet that may break out into view and ruin her hopes at any juncture. For Blanche knew within two weeks from the day when the yacht was washed ashore that her rival lived. Inside of the letter that startled and shocked her with this untimely news, was another addressed to Vanderveer. Alas! Brauna also trusted her, never seeing below the surface of the smiling face where is hidden her history and her character. They have been friends, and Blanche has even professed to confide to Brauna her own life story, well invented and charmingly told. Brauna believes her to be an honest and artless creature. For the safety of herself and her father, she may not write to Vanderveer directly. They suppose that search is being made, and that nothing must be done to risk the betrayal of their whereabouts. So the letter is inclosed through her closest friend—her most deadly enemy.

Blanche reads it to herself, her own letter from Brauna, with a startled panting of her breath, locked in her chamber where no eye can see and no ear hear:

“DEAR BLANCHE: He has told you all, I suppose, before this. I promised to write through you, because letters to him are not quite safe. I am not quite able to pen this for the fever that has seized me. We shall remain hidden where we are until it is safe to sail away

to some other corner of the world. When we are well beyond the reach of our foes, I will bid him come to me. I inclose a word for him, but I do not say anything about our dreadful exposure during the flight. He can not safely come to me, and it would only pain him to know that I am sick.”

There was more—words of confidence and sad hope for better and safer fortune. That her rival was in peril of her life, fleeing from arrest, and accused of crime, she has learned from Godby. But she, with them all, has believed that the beautiful fugitive perished in the sea. Now comes this letter to shatter her dreams of Vanderveer, which already she has begun to weave. It means that there lives still in the world the one woman whom Vanderveer loves. He will go to her, whom he has believed to be lost. He will never look again upon Blanche. He will break the spell with which she is even now beginning to envelop him without a regret, and fly to the arms of her rival. Blanche knows this. But there is a little grim—almost devilish—glitter in her eyes, her dovelike and artless blue eyes—making them as the cold and viperous eyes of a snake.

She slowly crushes the letter in her hand and sits down to think. For a half hour she sits, as motionless as stone, her face drawn and hard, staring into vacancy. Then she takes the letter inclosed for Vanderveer and holds it up against the light.

“Bah! What is conscience? A fiction—a plague—a devil! Why should it hinder me? I thought I had parted with that years ago. Did I not leave it in Paris? François swore once that it had been omitted, fortunately, from my sum of faculties. And I came near proving him a liar. I wonder if this feeling in me about that adorable man has anything to do with it? But it is gone. It was a mere folly of the passing instant. I haven’t really a conscience. François is quite right. Now let me prove it.”

Then she deliberately tears open Vanderveer’s letter.

As she reads, it torments her like the stings of a whip, till she cries aloud:

“I hate the devil—saint! I hate her!”

Then gets up and stands before her great mirror.

"Bah! It is childish. I will be sweet as honeyed oil. I will not be a weak fool, to scowl and be miserable. I will be happy. Hate? Certainly not. It makes wrinkles, and I haven't one on my face. I don't mean to have. Hate? Why should I? Have I not everything in my hands? Let her do the hating, while I play the game. It is my feeling for him. I must not let it make a conscience for me. It will be too uncomfortable—and I never had one to trouble me yet. Let me be an angel of light, and play the game. She is dead. Of course she is dead. Never have I received a letter from her. How can one receive letters from a dead woman? That is all I shall have to say. And I will not even have to say that. Things will happen that will make it unimportant for her to ask. She is dead. If he does not hear from her—but he will. Pshaw! But not soon. My God! not until I have felt his arms about me, not until I have felt his kisses. Oh, the weak idiot! To believe that she knows how to love! Love! What can she love? My adorable Harris shall love only me."

A flame burns in her marble cheeks and there is a light of blazing passion gleaming in her eyes.

"I will marry him—marry him. Then I can make a new history."

From this day she is excessively careful in her siege. No one could be more delicate. No one could be more discreet. She keeps him near her all she can; yet it ever seems to him that the appointments are all his, and that she has a coy reserve which makes her all the more attractive. She has experience and a kind of shrewd, intuitive tact that warns her where to stop in her allurements. She knows that Vanderveer's passion for Brauna has been sincere, and that he is held yet by his memories. But as the weeks go by she charms him out of his sadness. He begins to mingle again with the gay world. Especially is he to be seen at the unparalleled little dinners and dances that Miss Evanston gives, and it is soon whispered that Vanderveer will be off with the old love and on with the new before the winter goes by.

Blanche meanwhile has another constant visitor whom Vanderveer often meets going to the house or coming away, and wonders if he ought not to be jealous of him.

Three months have passed now, and the busy whirl of social dissipation at its reckless height in New York has driven out of the minds of nearly everybody the tragedy of the summer. Blanche has heard no more from the fugitives. She has taken the most desperate and unusual precautions to prevent Vanderveer from learning the truth. She is sitting again in her locked room, reading over the letters. Her success she believes is near. Vanderveer will not much longer be able to resist her. He is becoming sentimental and confidential. Blanche meanwhile carries in her soul a load of anxious apprehension.

"The time goes by—it goes by," she murmurs to herself. "They will not dare to return, they have not dared to write him yet. It is time he spoke. He shall speak soon. Ah! When he does. But then my danger only begins. François merely means me to—wait. I have had almost enough of him. He comes here every day with his orders and his threats—he is of the past—at least, he soon will be. I will marry Vanderveer—then let us see what he can do."

As she says this she hears a ring at the door bell.

"It is François himself. How is it that one can tell by the manner of ringing a bell? Speak of Satan and he will appear."

She thrusts the fatal letters into her bosom, and goes out with her smiling face into the drawing-room.

"Monsieur d'Avigne," announces the butler, as a tall, erect, somewhat soldierly looking man, with a decided air of distinction, enters the room. A heavy flowing black moustache hides his mouth, and heavy, drooping lashes shade his ever-shifting dark eyes.

"*Ma chère, mon amie*, I salute you," he says, with a great pretense of gallantry, kissing the pretty little hand of his hostess, and bowing very low. "I find your cheeks as rosy as the dawn, and you as charming as ever. Does any one listen to my poor compliments, I wonder?"

"Peace, François! They are stale and unprofitable. I knew how lovely I am long before you discovered it."

"In the old days. Yes. But you grow upon me. Each day adds new charms. How elegantly you use the money. That dress never was made by itself. Like all your dresses, it grew upon your person. You were ever the amazement of the Rue——"

"No more. I am glad you came. I was near to having a shock, some weeks ago. I have decided to tell you what it is."

"Excellent. Whatever has shocked you is my enemy. But how is this? I thought you proof against the weakness of being shocked, Dodo. A shock! Come, come—it is a fiction."

"I am done with them. Henceforth and hereafter I shall always speak the truth. You hear that, Monsieur?"

She sits down confidentially beside him, with the freedom of intimate acquaintance, her beautiful eyes sparkling, her red lips smiling the while.

"It is an excellent and original idea. You will be a marked character in history. George Washington, the patron saint of the Americans, will pale beside you. Moreover, it is the only really effectual way to deceive anybody."

"That is the very idea, *mon ami*, since everybody expects one to lie."

"And what did you say? A shock?"

"Did I not say a shock?"

"Pardon, madame—ma'mselle—pray tell me about the shock. Did you propose to Monsieur Vanderveer—and get a refusal?"

D'Avigne raises his delicate hand and brushes away a mass of fine black hair from his high, white forehead.

"We shall joke together in the face of death, François, I suppose. Sit over there a little farther away—in fact, the farther the better, so that I can see by your face how you bear it."

He laughs, and takes a chair by the table facing Blanche as he sits.

"And now the shock! I do not credit you. You do not shock at a raindrop."

"This is more than a raindrop."

"So was the affair in the Rue Navarin."

"Let it be. Why must you forever drag out the ghosts? It was you who taught me to look and not tremble."

"Not so. No one taught you. You have the nerve of a hundred heroes. But the shock? Am I not dying to hear it?"

"No. If you were I should not tell it. I should let you die."

"Thanks. But I am not dying, then. I will never die."

"Not until you must. So of all of us. Well, then, my love, hear what I have learned. They did not drown. They live."

"The devil!"

"What? And are you shocked, too? Ha, ha, ha! And after such adventures as that of the Rue Navarin. You are weak, Monsieur."

She pouts and flouts at him with her entrancing piquancy, while she laughs mockingly at his surprise.

"Ah! No, no! You are quite mistaken. I was not startled at all. Certainly not, fair one. It was more to hear you say 'my love,' I assure you."

"Oh! I mean nothing at all by that. It is a mere foolish habit. It is as much as to say that I abominate you and tolerate you. That is all. We are such old chums we ought to know how to hate each other decently, don't you think? But my news. It is strictly true. Bah! Was it not a scurvy trick for her to play? That adorable Vanderveer, he must be told at once, I suppose? That ends our little plan, you see, my good fellow."

"It does? Not so. But I see you are merely teasing me. They are dead."

"Read these, if you mean to insist that I am lying to you," responds Blanche, taking Brauna's letters from her bosom and tossing them to him.

D'Avigne reads them slowly, noting first their date.

"It complicates our plans, Dodo, dear," he remarks, looking at her inquiringly. "I think you show bad taste to open and read the inclosure."

"To be sure. But why will you say Dodo? Say Blanche. Dodo is a being of the past merely. Let her rest. But you see how we are brought to an end by this. Of course, you expect me to give Vanderveer his love note?"

"Yes. He will not ask, I presume, how you came to open it, nor if you have read it. By the way, the date is not recent. Perhaps you won't mind telling me why you have not given it him before?"

"Oh, I hadn't the heart to spoil all our good friendship, you see. But now that I have resolved upon reform, and to tell the truth henceforth——"

"Yes. Haven't I heard of Satan reforming, somewhere? When are you going to take the letter to Monsieur Vanderveer?"

"When you become a saint—not before," she says, with a laugh and a shrug of her shoulders.

"Indefinitely postponed," he rejoins, showing a gleam of white teeth as he smiles at her. "I don't seem to be any more saintly than you, do I?"

"We both hate saints, certainly. But seriously, we shall be quite equal to a little emergency like this, shall we not? Vanderveer is enormously rich, they say. And our money is going so awfully fast."

She fixes a glittering, significant look upon the man and smiles.

"Rich as Montford, of the Liverpool company?"

"Doubtless."

"Who died suddenly!"

"Under suspicious circumstances. Ah! François, that was a blunder. Had we waited another three months we should be richer by ten thousand English pounds."

"Not so. We should be in Australia—serving time. You would have astonished the whole colony. Such a remarkable convict!"

"Bah! I say it was a blunder. Montford was about to withdraw from the Liverpool company. If we had allowed him to do that, he would have willed

me or given me his proceeds in cash. Instead of that he died, and we dared not wait for the probate. We had to be content to disappear with the cash that was in his vaults. It was a clear loss, I say. But let us not gossip. We have prospered on the simplicity of fools. Vanderveer is young. He shall live. He is more attractive than Montford. We are merely to pluck him—is that right?"

"Yes. At least, we will let the circumstances determine. Pity the English custom of marriage settlements is not also American. Montford thought he could put into the hands of an angel as much money as he could trust in a bank. I say it was good fortune for him to die. I would rather die myself than to think I am deceived in you, Dodo, beautiful Dodo. And he did not live to find out that instead of an angel you are a——"

"Cherub. Yes. Thank you. He went to heaven swearing that I am one. He was entirely right. You think so, too. He was not half as badly deceived as you. Some day, when you and I fall out—— But you may never live until then. What do you think of the shock? Is it not a genuine sensation? I feel uneasy."

"Vanderveer is ripe. Why do you not pluck him? He is slow as a sloth."

"Too slow, too slow by half."

"But the letters are lucky again. Do you not remember the first day I saw you in Goidbeau's house, when I assured you that if you would give me just one kiss with those lips of yours, that make me so mad with love for you, that you would be lucky as long as you live? Have you not had luck ever since, pray? The very first luck was to begin to shake off the hold of Goidbeau. Then we lived like royalty. We have had adventures, haven't we? And there isn't a wrinkle on your face yet to prove an unhappy moment. Goidbeau was an accommodating and sensible fellow, who saw clearly that you are not of his level. Shall genius like yours be tied to a clod. Not so! I have genius, too, Dodo, and we two have ever been more than a match for the world's evil. The police of Paris

never found such exciting objects of curiosity as you and I. But we were not forced to stay in Paris. New York is beastly, and Liverpool is dirty, but it is good to see the world. Some time we will return to Paris. But these letters. I say they are lucky again. Suppose she had written directly to Vanderveer."

"Oh, she is sure to do that sooner or later—when she thinks it safe. Let me tell you what I have done. I have used Goidbeau."

"He is in Russia, I hear."

"Stupid! He went as far as the dock at the foot of Chambers Street. He is a Frenchman again. Goidbeau was lucky to find here the Nihilists with whom he consorted in Paris. I never had anything to do with them. But Goidbeau did. You were right in saying that he might be useful as a Nihilist some day. He has been, as you know. He was whipped for letting them escape, and good enough for him. Then he was ordered to Russia on some pretense. But he did not go. He merely shaved off his English whiskers, ceased to write his name Godby, and returned to French and bad English. Presto, he is ours again, and no Nihilist in his league would know him, he is so changed. Very well. By my advice he applied for a position as clerk in Vanderveer's office. My recommendation was enough to secure him that position. He receives the mail, François, dear."

"Magnificent plotter! It is superb! You are diviner than ever. So! Then if she writes to him you will get the letters. Exactly! But that won't last. Such arrangements never do. The thing to do now is to bring Vanderveer to time."

"Exactly. That is the thing about which I wish to consult you. I mean to marry Vanderveer and go on my wedding trip—perhaps to Paris."

"Admirable!"

CHAPTER IX.

"WE LIVE AND DIE TOGETHER."

The common adventuress is ordinarily unattractive, but here is a remarkable actress, dealing with tragedies, and projecting plots worthy the finest and most accomplished conspirator. Her face is as unruffled as a child's, and her laugh as simple and natural as a cherub's, to which celestial being she has compared herself. Fortunately nature is not lavish in making such combinations. Sin marks the average transgressor, but now and then a being is created who contrives to be fair in proportion to his depravity.

She smiles upon d'Avigne from her seat, tapping her pretty foot on the carpet, and looking like a well-developed schoolgirl, or a young lady engaged in an innocent conversation about the latest sensation of society.

"Yes; I fancy going back to Paris. Mrs. Vanderveer! How aristocratic that sounds, François, dear. Do you not think he is handsome?"

"Bah, no. He has no style. No repose. But what matters it? His money will spend quite as well. Only, I do not admire your taste."

"That is merely because you are vain and jealous, *mon ami*. You compare him with yourself. But he is far handsomer."

François looks at her fixedly. He does not know how far she may go in her admiration of Vanderveer. He thinks her heartless, yet at times has fancied that she might be reckless in love, if she should conceive a genuine passion. When she speaks of Vanderveer there is a slight change in her tones, something in her manner that he does not like. He has felt all this without defining it to himself.

"I advise," he remarks, slowly, "that you do not take your wedding trip to Paris. It might do for you, but as for me, I have reason to prefer New York. And how could you ever be happy without my company—even if you have a husband. Besides, I should not really dare to trust you with a husband. You

might get a conscience in a little while, and then where would I be? Besides, Paris is too far. We will find it better to secure his money early. Have you planned that well, Dodo? It is important."

"I attend to everything, do I not? Have I not long ago appealed to him for advice about my own investments? That was a very good way to inform myself how he stands as to his. I can put my hands on more than we realized from Montford within a week from the time I marry him, I am sure."

"It is delightful. You plan everything. How do you come on with him?"

"Ah! That is the whole point of the matter. To make him speak at once, is the problem. Advise me."

"When you get the opportunity, tell him that you are going to Europe with me. Say that I am to escort you, as I happen to be going also."

"Admirable! He is already jealous of you. He actually asked me why you come here so much. But we have no time to lose. Should he by any chance learn that Brauna Carrington still lives we could not win. And he is very rich. It will be our last great adventure. If it succeeds, we will then reform, my dear—reform."

"*Sacre!* Virtue would kill me of ennui in three months. The whole interest in life would be gone. Ah! the glorious pique there is in outwitting the sharp-nosed creatures of the police department. And I suppose I shall never be really satisfied even after we have put this rich romantic darling in the same——"

"Have done! We will put him nowhere at all. He is destined to live."

There comes a change in the girlish face that hardens it a little as she closes her pretty lips very closely together over the glitter of her pearly teeth. D'Avigne looks at her sharply, a kind of chilly menace stealing into his eyes.

"Be more careful of your emotions, Dodo, pretty Dodo. You might lead me to suspect by a trifle that you even love this fine god Vanderveer," he jeers.

She drops her eyes and wavers in her composure, while a little flush of color creeps into her cheeks.

"Bah! Of course. Every woman loves him. He is quite divine. And what if I do love the dear creature. Who can prevent, pray? Not you, Monsieur d'Avigne."

She laughs and shrugs her shoulders, and looks at him in a kind of piquant defiance that covers as well as possible the tumult that his words have stirred in her. It is good acting, and deceives her companion a little. A little, but not quite enough; for he reflects a moment while he scrutinizes her, and then replies:

"Oh! So you contemplate a rebellion. Cunning Dodo! I never believed you a fool. It is quite impossible. Why do you plague and make sport of me thus? You will even dare to desert me next. It will break my heart, Dodo. Yours, too. What could either of us do without the other? Life would be absolutely worthless."

"Your heart? That is too good, now! You make me laugh, François. But if I find a handsomer and a richer man, why should I not change the scene? Desert you! Pray who owns me, anyway?"

"A most incomparable man. One M. d'Avigne—at least, that is what he is called in New York. It is long ago since he was christened, and I forget his other names. He owns you, of course! Do you deny it? Then I will remind you that the stranglers of Paris even recognized the claim, and on one occasion when they saw clearly that you had received from Ruel five hundred francs, and had been observed coming out of the house of the Minister of Justice at midnight, they seized you, and Boutillierre, the inkmaker's apprentice, had in his hand the same cord which had been used in former times by that famous strangler, Antoine Ragout."

"You were not pale, I remember, though they had tied your hands and your feet, and had left you for five minutes to gaze upon the great picture of the Virgin in the corner of M. Raphael's den. It was then that I demonstrated to Boutillierre, and to the others, that you were the ablest woman of the Rue Laval, and offered to be responsible for you if the cord should again be hung on the great hook where it was always

kept as an example to the weak. Is it not as I have related, Dodo, dear?"

Conjuring thus with the ghosts of her history, d'Avigne keeps his glittering eyes fixed on her, seeking to terrify and cow her. He is uneasy at her deceit, and her over fine acting. He has feared before that Vanderveer is a slight element of discord in his projects. But he believed he could manage Dodo.

"Ah!" she says, without any apparent consciousness of the menace in his manner. "It is true you needed my talents so much that you preferred to overlook my visit to the house of the Minister of Justice. But I never really assented to such a preposterous claim as you have just made. Own me? That is a most absurd folly, *mon ami*. It is I who own you. Well, let it go. On the whole, I don't own you. It would be troublesome to have such a disagreeable responsibility. I like facts. Fictions weary me. The fact is better, and the fact is merely that you and I have been partners in several interesting adventures, to the success of which I contributed far more than you did. Partners at will, François! I have forgotten the affair of the five hundred francs. It is stupid to remember a thing of that sort so many years. As for me, I own myself. Goidbeau will testify to you that that is the ideal thing for me—and for you too. You remember that Goidbeau had a fancy once that he owned me. He was cured. He has no disposition to recur to the delusion."

She leans back voluptuously in her chair, and looks at d'Avigne with a soft, innocent smile, that tells him she has recovered her magnificent self-possession entirely, and can not be thrown from it again soon. But he says, with a laugh:

"You are too fine to scold, Dodo. I even begin to think more than ever that you are in love. But when you are all ready to desert me, adorable partner, you should promise to notify me in season."

"Certainly. I will give notice in a manner that you can appreciate. I mean, tell the police where they may find you—where they may find——"

She pauses and eyes him with artless blandness, and

he, interrupting, finishes her sentence far differently than she intended:

"Where to find—us. My fine Dodo! To think of putting that fine, sensuous head into the tiger's mouth! Do I not know that you are lovelier than an angel and abler than a fiend? But you would fare ill in a contest with the man who succeeded without difficulty in outwitting the most skillful detectives in France. Did I not leave my mark every month? Sometimes it lay at the door of the Minister of Justice himself. Paris has not forgotten the stranglers of the Seine."

He speaks carelessly, and smiles as he speaks, as if they were discussing merely the merits of a breakfast. If this woman, companion with him in many offenses, shudders at the undertone of menace in his voice, or at the look that now and then is flashed from his black eyes, she shows nothing in her manner. They might be merely a pair of friends gossiping of the weather.

"Of course, my love, you do not think such boasting really becoming to your reputation. I am ashamed of you. It is bad taste. And I am sure I care so little about your innocent blustering that I shall not remember it until you are through speaking. Dodo has not learned to turn pale even yet. What could you do, pray? *Parbleu!* If you touched me I could prick you with my little poniard—and presto! in five minutes you would be dead—as dead as old Monsieur Rigot, of the Rue de Naples."

"*Ma chérie*, such defiance is charming from your fine, red lips. It is more delicious to quarrel with you than to agree with any other woman on earth. But no more of it now. Our adventure binds us together. Besides, as I have said, you can live without me no more than I without you. It is the money we are pursuing, is it not? Your beautiful Vanderveer may live forever—after we have plucked him. But don't love the nice wretch. If you should, very likely you would find him some fine morning with a red mark on his neck, stark dead in his bed. As for you and me, Dodo, we live and die together."

"If you don't get cross, but make an effort to be

agreeable. You are unusually disagreeable to-day. Give me back the letters."

"Yours. This one to Vanderveer I will keep. I might wish to copy it."

"What do you mean?"

She has caught a little sense of a cunning intention in his manner.

"It might become necessary to shock him also. I guard against you, charming Dodo. He need never know that you have opened his letters, especially this letter. It lies with me."

"Give me the letter. I prefer to keep it myself."

D'Avigne smiles and throws one letter only on the table. The letter for Vanderveer he folds and puts in his pocket. He thinks the time may come when he would wish to have the means of opening Vanderveer's eyes in case she should really care enough for him to lead her to trifle with their common interests, for he is not wholly easy about the matter.

"You will regret," she says, in a low tone. "But regrets always come after it is too late."

"Regret! I never regret, Dodo dear. Kiss me before I am gone, charming one."

He rises and looks at his watch. When he again looks up, Blanche has disappeared through the curtains, sweeping out of the room like a noiseless animal.

"And without even a kiss," he murmurs, smiling at the curtain, still moving where she let it fall behind her. Then he laughs softly and puts on his hat in the hall.

"The soft, lovely kitten," he says to himself. "Too bad! Too bad! But I really fear I shall be obliged to put the cord to her lovely neck by and by. Poor, beautiful wretch!"

CHAPTER X.

"I HAVE DONE IT."

Not many hours have passed since Monsieur d'Avigne's call when he and Miss Evanston meet again at a little social function where Blanche, now a

vision of loveliness, in a cloud of blue and pink silk and gauze, is, as usual, surrounded by admirers. Timing his attention, François manages to come up to her, bearing some dainty, just as Harris is before her with his offering.

"Permit me," remarks M. d'Avigne, bowing very low, as he presents the confection.

"Pardon, I am ahead. Permit me," cries Mr. Vanderveer.

"It is delicious—and I will permit you *both*," replies the gracious beauty. "Watch me now, and see which of these ices I destroy with the greater delight."

M. d'Avigne, smiling and elegant, reaches out a dainty little folded napkin, and says gayly:

"At least I shall have the honor to present you this, Miss Evanston—with my most sincere compliments, and wishing you a pleasant evening."

He gives her a significant look and fans the folded napkin before her until she understands with some curiosity that it contains information for her. As she takes the proffered napkin, Vanderveer, at her elbow, says, sentimentally:

"Monsieur d'Avigne is a diplomat, Miss Evanston. But his ice is far inferior to mine. He brings you but one flavor, while mine has three."

"True, Mr. Vanderveer," she replies, showing her white teeth in the most ravishing of smiles. "Therefore I shall eat yours first. Monsieur d'Avigne shall be content with having supplied me with a napkin. It is pretty as an art work too. I mean to keep it for a pattern until I give my next evening."

She thrusts it in a fold of her gown as she flashes at François a smile and a look that says to him very plainly:

"I understand you."

Aloud she continues her artless repartee with the man whom she has determined shall this very evening ask her to become his wife:

"It is my experience, Mr. Vanderveer. I mean my inexperience. When I am older I shall be able to express my preference for ices with greater discreetness. They say one does not learn to be sly before one is thirty."

Thirty! And he has never before asked himself how old this delicious doll really may be. She is witty and composed enough to be of any dreadful age, but her artless face is eighteen—not a day more.

“Oh, I am satisfied,” he says, with a laugh. “So is Monsieur d’Avigne, I trust. He has a compliment for his napkin and I for the ice. It is quits.”

“There! A drop on my dress! I believe you did it too, you nice bungler. Now I will punish you for it by retiring while I save this lovely silk. Excuse me a moment, Mr. Vanderveer—and Monsieur.”

It was most prettily done, and very naturally. She gives the ices over to Vanderveer, because that would be a reason for returning to him, with a warm smile that makes him feel unusually satisfied with himself, and then loses herself in the distance while he gazes after her, wondering in his heart why he had not before this made that odious d’Avigne’s attentions impossible by speaking a word that, in the past few weeks, has been on his lips more than once.

Upstairs Blanche finds a place by herself. She tears open d’Avigne’s note and reads, with dilating eyes:

“I have discovered two things: First, Ruel has heard that Dodo, of the Rue Laval, is in New York playing the old tricks in high society. He guesses, do you not imagine, that François of the Seine is with her. Secondly, Goidbeau has found out that the hiding-place of Alvaroff and his daughter is known to Golfi, the chief of the Nihilists, and that they are likely to be seized in a few days. You have, therefore, to work on an emergency. But you know how, incomparable one! Tell him you will start for Europe next week—to remain. He is fascinated, plainly. He will yield. Work quickly, and there will yet be time. You are right about the bonds. Goidbeau says he knows them to be in V’s safe, unregistered and negotiable.”

Blanche, panting and shivering, reads this through twice. She has changed in a week past. François has seen that. She seems to have more mobility than before in the betrayal of her emotions.

"Ruel's men!" she says, under her breath. Then she recovers and smiles again, until her beautiful teeth gleam between her parted lips.

"A fig for Ruel! Let me resume my evening."

Shaking herself free from her disturbed condition, she returns without a cloud on her face; showing herself where she knows Vanderveer can see, she shoots a glance at d'Avigne that may well be mistaken by a jealous admirer for a dangerous glance of confidence, or even of love, and then talks nonsense for five minutes in the most charming fashion to a group of men that gather about her as the moths flutter in a candle flame. She knows he will be unable to endure that, and that he will come. He feels the magnet, and draws near, as she expected him to do, now a little and then a little, until he joins the group and carries her off after a time, to a sly corner, with his heart nearly raging to remember that glance she has flung at the odious Frenchman. And here he has her all to himself, paying no attention to her artless protests against such gross discourtesy to the remainder of the company.

"But I forgive you," she says, pensively, seated by his side, and playing on him with her blue eyes, her breath and pose charming him with voluptuous influences. "Especially," she adds, "as you will have very few more opportunities."

"Few more? What does that mean?" he demands, expecting some pretty jest in reply.

"Oh! You haven't heard, then? We are off next Wednesday to France, Spain, the Orient, heaven knows where. All over the Continent, I suppose."

She sighs, and taps her white glove against her fan.

"Impossible! What—go and—and not a—a word to me?" cries Harris, in a tone so full of injured surprise that she laughs, and replies, smartly:

"And why to you, pray? Truly, we haven't told our friends, yet, any of them. The date was fixed rather suddenly—only yesterday. It will be delightful. You see we intended to go this winter, but not quite so soon. But we found out—Auntie and I—that Mon-

sieur d'Avigne is to sail on Wednesday, so we take advantage of his company. He will be such a delightful escort—he is so polite and so helpful. Delightful company, don't you think? Besides, he has traveled so much he can give us all the points. And we are both as helpless as chickens in water in the matter of getting on away from home. Every one cheats you so! But Monsieur d'Avigne can take care of me, do you not think so?"

"The d——euce he can!" says Vanderveer, almost swearing. "Pray what do you think will become of me meanwhile?"

"Oh! I'm sure I can't possibly imagine. There is so much, however, in New York with which to console oneself——"

"What—and you gone? There won't be any New York left, I say."

"Stupid! New York is large and gay. I don't pretend that the city will be quite the same after I take my delectable self out of it. Of course not. I am a bright and shining light, but all the lesser lights will be left."

She tosses her head and hums a little air as she tantalizes him with her beauty and sparkling glances. She has felt that he is on the verge, and that in his surprise and regret he has mingled, whether consciously or unconsciously, a sudden and resolute passion that is in danger of overflowing upon her presently if they are not interrupted. She glances about and understands that they are alone. The heavy curtains shut them within a small alcove apartment, and no one will intrude, perhaps.

As for Vanderveer, he never before experienced such an emotion as he now feels toward d'Avigne. To send Blanche off to Europe where this Frenchman will have every possible opportunity to play upon her heart, if indeed he has not already captured it—it would be abominable! Does he, then, love her? Well, the presence of an artful, beautiful, sensuous woman, wrapped in her perfumes and bewildering him with the resplendent combination of her charms and wit and loveliness—these are influences that a man like

Vanderveer finds it hard to resist. Blanche to him is all purity, all wit, all beauty, all coyness and charm and soul of worth. Vanderveer now for the first time begins to realize how she has taken hold upon his life. She has been with him so much! She has solaced him when he would have been unspeakably lonely. She has never been disagreeable, and never tires him with petty hobbies and moralisms. Then, too, he has been enmeshed in the thrall of her sensuousness, that rounds itself inevitably into view with every shrug of her white shoulders and every animal-like pose and poise of her faultless form. He could not have sworn that he loved her, but he realized that he could not be happy with her gone. No one could fill her place—no one is like her. If this was not love, it was a kind of infatuation that might easily be mistaken for love. And in the maze of it Vanderveer will be lost as hopelessly as if it were genuine and spiritual.

He looks upon her now with this confused sense of her power over him, as she sits there in her evening gauzes floating about her, and coos and laughs with him, and as he feels more and more her magnetic hold drawing his soul into hers, he resolves to speak.

"Wednesday is a great way off, anyway," he says, a smile breaking in his face. "And when it comes I don't intend to let you go. We will wait until spring."

"We? You speak in riddles. Are you going, too? All the better. But if you do, then you will have to go next week—at least, if you go with us. That will be too lovely. Why not?"

"But I am not going next week. Neither are you. I won't have it. Only Monsieur d'Avigne will go next week, and alone. We are not going so soon. That is, unless you prefer to take the wedding trip that early."

It is out—in a quaint and blunt way indeed, but she understands it—had expected it—is prepared for it. Arching her eyebrows in well feigned astonishment, while the blood comes into her cheeks with the gratification of success, she drops her eyes, and says, with a demure laugh:

"Monsieur d'Avigne and I are not going on a wedding trip. We are not engaged, poor man."

She darts her eyes at him daringly, defying him to continue.

"D'Avigne? Let him alone," cries Harris, almost savagely. "What has he to do with *our* wedding trip? It is with *me* you will go on the wedding trip. If you say no, I will not take the answer—I will merely know in that case that you mean yes. But you are going to say yes in a minute. You couldn't say anything else unless you fib shockingly with your beautiful eyes. Say it now."

He takes her hand, warm and soft, and struggling a very little, but not enough to be in the least danger of escaping, and looks into her eyes with a flame in his own that makes even this artful woman tremble and sigh, with her exultation and delight. She is carnation now, and breathes on his cheek with her breath that comes and goes with the undulations of her bosom. Vanderveer bends and winds her in his embrace, as their lips meet.

"You bold, darling wretch," she says, laughing, as she draws away a little. "I don't see as you have left me anything to say. But you needn't kiss my lips out. There, there! But if you had spoken sooner, now—but I think I will say no since you threaten to call it the other thing. No! no! no! no! Besides, how dare you propose in such a wicked way? Did you hear me say *no*?"

She does not, however, attempt to release herself from his embracing arm. He laughs, and kisses her all he will, and says at length:

"Yes, I hear you. Four noes are equal to at least eight consents. Besides, you kissed me too. So now that is settled. You won't go to Europe, nor anywhere at all, with Monsieur d'Avigne."

"Oh! But I will. He has made all our arrangements. But there's nothing to prevent you following after in a few weeks."

"Oh, I can be ready to go along. We will take the wedding trip. The sooner the better. Wednesday is just a week away. Too much time by half. I will go down and engage the bridal stateroom at once. The name of the ship, please."

"Horrid man! Never! What, marry in a week? Not for a year, at the least. It isn't decent. Go away."

"Only with you, dear. But if you think it too soon you can postpone it a little."

"Neither, you persistent fellow. When I get back will be too soon. You can practice the delights of solitude until then. Oh, Harris!"

She lowers her tone and looks her love into his eyes. She loves him. And who shall say in these moments how her love is fighting in her with the memories of her sullied history? Could she now but tear out of her all that! For her love, and the knowledge that he loves her, has created a conscience at this supreme moment. She begins to long, in the light of his divine eyes, to fling that stained past into the gulfs of chaos forever.

But she will not yield to her self-horror for an instant. She enjoys too well this climax of delight. But under her pleasure there is a voice that tries to cry out "Unclean, unclean!" She shuts this conscience up in a cage, and will not permit it to haunt her. It is only his love, and his presence, that thus brings out in her all that is best, and makes her a self-accused wretch. But her will is strong, and she smiles on and alertly pursues the plot she is weaving. Oh, to have won him! To have felt the joy of his embraces, and the touch of his lips—for this will she not dare the tortures of hell? She loves him so!

It is the first and only love of her depraved life. It has in it her selfish and sensuous passion, no doubt, but if she has a soul it takes hold of her soul also. And she would gladly have dallied there with him forever. But she does not forget the emergency that François has revealed.

Vanderveer laughs at her denials, and continues, resolutely:

"I intend to have my own way about it, Blanche, dear. Of course, I always do. Tell me the name of that ship, now. Why should I love you so much, and be obliged to see you slip off just when I have you safe, pray? Oh, you are not a blind schoolgirl

not to have expected this. You have seen—my eyes have told you. You knew that you had taken her place long ago. So you must not leave me now. Say you will not—my own!”

“Oh, Vanderveer—Harris. Oh! You love me! Yes! Your eyes are telltales, of course. But one doesn’t usually propose with the eyes alone. I of course had no particular right to make my plans to accord with your eyes, had I? You unreasonable man? But you men always lay the blame on us.”

“Of course. That is the thing to do, isn’t it? But you can remedy the mischief. I say a week is a long time. Now don’t dispute that, please. You will be ready now—of course. Wednesday at noon. Say yes!”

She must not dally at that. She knew he would propose that, and she only makes a decent protest. Then she says, with a laugh and a pout:

“I haven’t a dress to be married in, anyway. If you tease me I will wear calico. It will be scandalous. To marry in six days! And it takes three months’ quick work to make a little bit of an outfit in which to get married.”

“Nonsense! Madame Donovan will have you in the most elegant dress inside of six days that ever astonished the avenue. I guarantee that. And as for milliners, they will bury you in bonnets and laces before that time. It is yes, then?”

“You persistent, nice tease! Auntie will show you how impossible and absurd your haste is. A week, only think! But the consequence will be that you will marry a fright. But I suppose—well, we are going on the ‘Arizona.’”

It is settled. He is snared, and in a week she will find a reason for some little postponement of the trip. There will be, according to the plan, a somewhat quieter little wedding than Blanche would have enjoyed, perhaps. But she is not posing before the public greatly. She is greatly disturbed by the threat from Paris, and much more disquieted by the thought that this cup, now at her very lips, may be dashed down by the resurrection of her rival—it stirs her with mad

impatience to put herself and Vanderveer both beyond the reach of that possibility.

"If you keep away from the house and don't bother me too much," she says, gayly, returning Vanderveer's kisses coyly, "possibly I may manage to get one dress together—you obstinate creature! But you will have to settle this thing with Auntie."

A girl in leading strings could not be more considerate of "Auntie."

"Oh!" replies the lover, "there are dresses in Paris, even in Spain, I fancy. And I almost believe you have two or three that are wearable now. One week."

He bends over her, looks his passion into her eyes, makes her thrill with the soft touch of his hand on hers, and after a few more tender exchanges of sentiment, they go back into the parlors, Blanche carrying in her heart, paramount above all other feelings, the consciousness that she has won him, and that he loves her. She has an air of self-conscious proprietorship which of course sets all the house to whispering slyly, and the company in general soon have little doubt of an engagement.

But her brow contracts a little as her eyes fall on d'Avigne.

Her evil genius!

To look at him recalls her—drags her down from her high exultation. If it were not for him she might be honorable again, perhaps—might even sponge conscience out and live and die with Vanderveer. Now she feels his hand on her heartstrings, and shudders in the midst of her triumph, to be recalled to the sting and curse of her history. Ah! She must defeat and destroy this viper or this dream of mad love will be as short as the climax of a tragedy. He has to speak but a word and this dashing lover, with his aristocratic lineage and instincts, will spurn her to the dust, to grovel there forever in her shame. Retribution will bring irretrievable misery now, to cover her and ruin her, unless she is greater and more subtle than d'Avigne. Is she?

Any way, she will dare this desperate battle with him. Her wit against his, and a duel to the death!

She has not failed of devices to cover her tracks. Even Ruel's men, if set face to face with her, could not be certain of her identity, she thinks. She will go on to her wedding, and then, and meanwhile, she will weave about this criminal of the Seine—her fellow criminal—a web that will enmesh him without injury to herself.

She looks at him now—this remarkable actress—with a doll-like smile, and a little wave of her fan, that says to this confederate of her secrets in perfectly intelligible language:

“I have done it.”

Then she chatters away to Harris, and no one could dream, looking in her placid face, that it covers such fears and plots.

Vanderveer, feeling on his arm the magnetic touch of her hand, and gazing down into her incomparable blue eyes, charmed, entranced, exultant, nevertheless now and then amid the throng, in the sound of the music, and surrounded by the lights and perfumes, strangely seems to hear a voice out of the past, and there floats before him ever and again the darker eyes and diviner face of that one whom he thinks of as lying in the peaceful stillness of old ocean's slumberous breast. The vision saddens him in spite of his new-found and exciting pleasure in the company of his beautiful fiancée.

François comes carelessly over, saying:

“I have missed you, Miss Evanston. Did you succeed in removing the spot?”

Vanderveer sees in this a mere inquiry about the spot upon her dress. But to her it means: “Did you accomplish your purpose effectually?”

She looks at him and nods her head, and replies with a merry laugh:

“I have been telling Mr. Vanderveer that you had engaged staterooms on the ‘Arizona’ for next Wednesday for Auntie and me. And do you know, Monsieur d’Avigne, he was so dreadfully afraid of being lonesome here in New York with us away, he has insisted on going with us. The absurd man!”

“With us? Happy, I am sure,” says François, pre-

tending to look crestfallen. "I trust you gave him permission to go, Miss Evanston?"

"Did I? Well—he is a persistent creature. You never could guess how he begged to go. I had to consent. But I trust neither of us will ever regret it. Do you think I will, Monsieur d'Avigne?"

"Regret it? I don't think I understand," he replies, a little stiffly, as if he did not care to talk about the affairs of Mr. Vanderveer, but Blanche laughs at him, and says, demurely:

"Yes. Regret. You see I have promised to marry him before we start. Give him your congratulations, now."

"What? Ah—oh—" stammers the expert actor, "to be sure. Most happy! Mr. Vanderveer, my good wishes. Most unexpected, I am sure. I greatly fear my business will after all delay me. But not you at all. I shall be glad to serve you by turning the fares over to Mr. Vanderveer."

CHAPTER XI.

"IF HE WERE BUT DEAD."

On the evening of the next day after Vanderveer's proposal to Blanche Evanston a carriage driven rapidly down Broadway stops before the building in which that gentleman's office is located. A woman, cloaked and veiled, alights from this carriage, and passes into a little alley beside the building. The carriage draws half a block away and there waits.

Blanche enters the building, now deserted except by a drowsy janitor and the man whom she has come here by appointment to see. It is Godby—Goidbeau by a little restoration of his proper identity. He is clean-shaven and wears a red wig—a change sufficient to disguise him beyond recognition on any casual inspection from the knowledge of his former acquaintance among the Nihilists.

"Ah! You expected me, I see," says Blanche, lifting her veil. "Take me to his office."

"To be sure, Mam'selle——"

"Stop, Goidbeau! I am not Mam'selle. Say Miss Evanston. Never anything else. And you are James, or you are Smith. Don't forget. Either will do. To be sure, when we are entirely alone it matters less—but the habit is bad. Don't let mistakes of speech grow on you, Smith. Be as careful as I am."

"You are in no danger of permitting me to forget, I see, Miss Evanston. Your name is Miss Evanston until I die. This way. The elevators stop at six. We must climb the stairs."

Blanche follows him in silence, and in a brief time they are shut in together in Vanderveer's luxurious office.

"Sit over there, please. I wish to talk with you."

She waves her hand toward a chair, and Goidbeau seats himself, as directed. Blanche eyes him for a moment, calculating her way. She has had a day in which to take her resolves and lay her plans. Her situation makes her desperate. She has concluded that the only thing now is to stake everything on a grand coup. She has entered her present condition in a scheme of mere robbery on a large scale, as the confederate and to some extent the creature of another. She has found herself on the threshold of success, with the original scheme hateful to her imagination and herself transformed from a base adventuress into a possible bride, to whom the past might be as the history of another soul, while her own will take new shapes and walk new paths.

Her confederate must be abandoned and destroyed. For Vanderveer and for herself more, she will send him to his doom as freely as she would crush a snake. And in the day that has passed, postponing the trousseau and everything else, she has hardened herself to dare this last act in her drama of crime, before she enters upon her new life. Then she will bury memory in the deep grave of oblivion, go to the ends of the earth with him until she has forgotten; she will live with him and die with him—her good angel and her adorable god. But François first.

"I wish to recall Paris—the Rue Laval," she be-

gins, toying with her glove that she has drawn off from one hand. "Tell me how you like your position here. No letters yet?"

"None. But they will strike before long. I learned that much. I have a friend with the Golfi gang, as I told you. But why do you speak of Paris? Were you ever in Paris—Miss Evanston?"

Goidbeau chuckles, and winks coarsely at this witticism, as he thinks it.

"Yes; with you. I wish now to go again. Paris, lovely Paris," she murmurs, dreamily. "How would you also like to go to Paris, Godby?"

She speaks so slyly and threateningly that Goidbeau, who knew her of old, and reads the undertone of her speech as well as the actual meaning of the words, shivers a little, and looks at her keenly.

"It was a plain question. Why do you no longer understand plain questions, Godby? You used to be a shrewd rogue, not needing to be told twice. I asked if you would like to go to Paris."

"On what errand, then? It all depends. On some accounts it is less agreeable than New York."

"But not if Paris were just a little safe—ah, Mr. Godby?"

"If you called me Pierre Goidbeau—of the Rue Laval—no one would hear. And it sounds Parisian compared with vile English Godby."

"Very well, Pierre Goidbeau of the Rue Laval—you are likely to have the opportunity soon to visit Paris, I hear."

She speaks in the same dreamy tone that always means to Goidbeau that she is threatening him, and that she had some startling thing to say. He shivers again and keeps silent, watching her in fear.

"Yes," she goes on, slowly. "In fact, I am aware that Ruel's men are arranging to give you a free passage."

"Ruel! The devil!"

"Smooth, Pierre! It is only a little matter of having your head cut off with Finisterre's guillotine. You will not feel it half a minute—the nice, darling knife. Monsieur Guillotine was a benefactor of his race, who

invented the charming contrivance. It was concocted just before the Revolution and just in season for France. Beautiful Guillotine!"

"Tush! For God's sake stop your horrible chatter, Dodo! Monsieur Finisterre will never put my head in his basket."

"You are doomed already!"

She fixes her glittering eyes on him and awaits the effect of her words. Nothing could be more terrifying or more dramatic than this wonderful woman when she chooses, and Goidbeau actually cowers and shrinks away from her, as she utters these ominous and threatening words.

"You wish to frighten me, Dodo. It won't do. What are you trying to do?"

"François is about to betray you to the police, who will turn you over to Ruel's men. He wishes now to be rid of you forever."

Goidbeau, turning very pale, nevertheless rallies and says, doggedly:

"I don't believe it. He would not dare. *Pardieu!* The Paris hounds would give a thousand francs for him to every sou on me. He would only insure his own downfall. You are crazy, Dodo."

"Bah! Was I ever wont to talk as a fool, Pierre? Listen to me. Within ten days you will be seized. Monsieur d'Avigne will not be in evidence. He will be in New Orleans, in Alaska, in Honolulu."

"It is devilish! It is incredible! Why, then, do you warn me? He has no reason. He would not dare."

"Dare! What would he not dare? Of what is he not capable? And he has a reason. He desires to take off the millstone from his neck. The time will come, sooner or later, when you, being a coward, and afraid of the guillotine, will take the authorities into your confidence under some stress of danger, preferring that he should make Monsieur Finisterre's acquaintance rather than yourself. *Parbleu!* Does he not know you? And as he is in no need of your services any more, why should he not take a good opportunity to be rid of the bad rubbish? And so he will.

He is not partial to you, as you know. You would long ago have come to grief if I had not shielded you. But there is an end of that now, Pierre. He has money enough—that is, he will have when he and I have divided the cash of my divine Vanderveer between us. He can go to the ends of the earth and commit new crimes in his own way. He will cut off the head of history when you and I go to the guillotine.”

“You! No, no! He would never dare touch you, Dodo.”

“Both of us. On the day after I get Vanderveer’s bonds hidden where he can put hands on them and disappear, we shall both be seized. All the detectives in Paris can never find nor overtake him. You know that.”

“God! I believe you, Dodo. He is capable of it. Yes. He has used us well—now he will turn on us.”

“Not so! We shall turn on him. I have learned the very day when Ruel’s men are to come. And that will be the day after my wedding.”

“You will actually marry him—do you mean?”

“Why not? What prevents?”

“François.”

“On the contrary, he counts on it. Did I not marry Montford of the Liverpool company? And this marriage with Vanderveer will be more legal than——”

She finishes the sentence with a gesture, and looks at Goidbeau with a gentle smile.

“More legal than yours and mine,” he laughs. “Say it, why don’t you, Dodo?”

“Ah! And you think I fear to say anything? Not at all. It is merely that one doesn’t like to make one’s mouth sick rehearsing disagreeable things. I could say it if I chose. Why not? Bah! The case is simple enough, and nobody cares. At least not I. You and I, two idiots, I being just fourteen—idiots, I say—especially you—pretended to marry. If I had not been so imprudent. I might even have loved you. Then I should have been the greater idiot, to be sure. But the marriage was a child’s farce—though you were nineteen. Of the miserable alliance not a

shred of evidence remains, and as little regret, I am sure. Lucky for both of us, Pierre! A devil of a life you would have led with a woman like me—if it had been possible for a woman like me to live with a man like you at all.”

“I admit it. *Pardieu!* I would indeed have found a hard life. The husband of Dodo. Think of it! A woman with the nerve of a headsman and the daring of a brigand. Have I ever regretted that you repudiated the marriage?”

Pierre laughs coarsely. He is pleased at Dodo's daring even yet. The past is only an episode to be forgotten or to be recalled without sentiment. And she, the fine blonde belle who has come actually into charmed circles of New York society, an adventuress and a criminal, has been the wife or the mistress of Pierre Goidbeau, the pawnbroker of the Rue Laval. And this coarse fellow holds the secret safely, and admires her as much as he can.

“And since we chose not to be anything more we have been friends, Pierre,” she continues, still smiling on him. “Therefore, when I hear of your danger, and learn also that it is my danger, I naturally come to you. And you and I together are not going to be beaten by the strangler—never, Pierre.”

“Ah! I remember when you were a blue-eyed girl in the Rue Laval—you made me give you the diamonds in my showcase, that the son of Linton the rich clothing maker, had pawned in my shop, and you brought back a cunning paste in their place. That was cunning enough, I say. From that have we not been friends, Dodo? I never could dare to be else. It fares so ill with your enemies. I consult my own interests and they ever say to me that your enmity is not to be incurred on any account. Your enemies are mine, and it fares ill with them, I say. Do I not remember the affair of the Rue Navarin?”

“The Rue Navarin has not forgotten it either, Pierre,” says Blanche, with a little shiver. “But why speak of it? There were other scenes in Paris more agreeable to us both. Not the horrible ones François arranged. He was the head—or he was the hand.

Cursed bloody hand, Pierre! Bah! He kills men as skillfully as an Indian thug. But I will not sit still while he does as much for Dodo. If it comes to that, Pierre Goidbeau, it would be far better to do the killing ourselves. Do you not think so? If he were but dead!" she adds, fixing her eyes upon Pierre.

Pierre makes no answer, but sits for some time silent.

CHAPTER XII.

"AH! YOU LOVE HIM. THAT IS THE SECRET OF IT ALL."

"If he were but dead," she repeats in the dreamy voice that Pierre hears always with a shiver.

"That is easy, I should think," he answers, shrugging his shoulders. "Why, then, do you not kill him, Dodo? I have often heard him say that it is much trouble saved to a man to be dead."

"True. But he is generous and unselfish, Pierre. He is willing to take some pains to end the trouble of others, especially if they are in his way. But he is quite willing to endure the troubles of this mortal life himself for an indefinite period yet. I even fancy he objects to being killed, even if I were to offer to do it myself."

"Ungrateful wretch! But in that case why not assume, Dodo dear, that you, having studied his welfare disinterestedly, know better what is best for him than he knows himself? He ought to rely on your judgment more as to the proper time for dying."

Goidbeau laughs at his own wit, while Blanche answers:

"It is easy to be witty on that scale, Godby. But you do not know our fine Monsieur d'Avigne. He says he was born in Corsica, where a man never dies until he has seen the graves of all his enemies. It is quite more likely he will kill me. Faugh! What if he should get those white hands and hawk fingers on my throat—the nice smiling fiend?"

"Don't permit it, Dodo. What are you thinking about? What do you propose? If you had not some nice plan you would never have come here."

"Soft, Pierre! I merely came to warn you."

"Ugh! How damned considerate! Why do you lie, Dodo? You came because you want my help."

Pierre laughs coarsely, and smiles at his own good spirits for a little while. Blanche eyes him, wondering if it is time to unfold her plan.

"You were not always so sharp, Pierre. New York air has whetted you greatly. Very well, I shall help you as much as you help me, be sure of that. Vanderveer will not believe anything. Will he, Pierre?"

"Not a word. He isn't that kind. Did he believe that the Nihilist, Brauna, committed the crime? Not he! Neither do I, for that matter."

"Do not speak of her. I hate her. Vanderveer will not believe, you say. All right! The first thing is to marry him. The next thing——"

She pauses to give her words the chance to sink into the consciousness of Pierre, and then softly continues:

"The next thing—is to give François over to Ruel."

"That would be idiotic. He would merely point out to them the place where they might find Dodo, of the Rue Laval, and Pierre, the pawnbroker, also, who had the fortune to be associated with her."

"Stupid! Very likely he will do that very thing. But what if I have a game worth two of that?"

Pierre only looks at her in growing wonder.

"Yes," she goes on, still smiling, "a game worth all his games, and to spare. Is not he the one of all others who Ruel will desire to seize? I will forestall him. I will go to Ruel's lieutenant, whoever he sends—will go in the carriage with Vanderveer, and in ten minutes I will convince him that I am Dodo of the Rue Laval, and that I have married an American aristocrat. At the same time I will assure him that to arrest me will do no good, as I will prove to the public by indisputable facts that I am no such person as Dodo. I shall advise him to save a scene, and do far better, by arresting the man they came over here after

—one François d'Avigne, who may be found at a certain number on a certain street. If that should at last fail, I shall then present my proofs. You will see."

"What proofs?"

"Why—are you quite an idiot, Goidbeau? Am I not able to *make* proofs, think you? Stupid! What if I show that I am the daughter of—say, a certain physician in Chicago. Very likely I will produce him, too. Oh, I will have enough witnesses! I have not wasted my time in New York. I am interested to avoid the guillotine, am I not? Very well! Since I have lived here not a day has passed that I did not weave a little web, or a little thread of the web. I have made a history reaching back twice as many years as I have been here. Is it not easy to recall to the memory of careless people things that never occurred? Let me show you how to make history, Pierre. The problem is to get people to remember that you were here seven years ago, when, in fact, you came here three and a half years ago. What is easier than to remind Miss Snodgrass that you met her in the year so and so, now over six years, at a certain watering place. The chances are she will presently remember it.

"Half a dozen allusions to the circumstance establish it as a fact. Then half a dozen more skillfully worded leave on her mind the conviction that it was she and not I who recalled the old acquaintance. Why, after that, the dear young fool, who has the thing now all manufactured in her head, will go into court if need be and swear she met me seven years ago in Saratoga, and has known me ever since, in all truth and sincerity. Another easily recalls, after the same course of tutoring, that my father from Chicago has several times visited me in New York. And so on and so on. As a matter of fact, it is beyond doubt in a dozen places at least that I have lived in New York since I was a child, that my dear papa lives in Chicago, and that my name is Blanche Evanston. Would this deceive Ruel? Not for a minute. He is familiar with all these tricks. But he would know very well that it would cost more than I am worth in Paris to unweave

my webs. I am as safe from Ruel as if he never existed. But not so with the pawnbroker."

The wonderful woman pauses. Pierre, drinking in this remarkable revelation of her woven lies made for a defense, stares at her in new amazement, and can not speak. She goes on, gayly:

"So you see, Pierre Goidbeau, that I told the truth when I assured you that I came to see you for your own good and not for mine. Who is the head now, think you—Dodo or François?"

"Dodo—forever, amen."

"You like the little plot, Pierre?"

"Why not? But what if Ruel makes a fuss? It will make scandal—and even you can not afford that."

"Trust me. I can keep things quiet, I am sure. It is only to get by a day or two. Let me but see François in irons and Vanderveer in the meshes of matrimony—after that they will all have a fine time catching me. And Vanderveer will protect his wife, of course. Only, I don't intend it to come to that."

"And what is my part?"

"Patient, patient Goidbeau. In due time! Ruel's man shall never know of your presence in New York if you are discreet and do your part. Let me finish. I shall show my scheme to Ruel's man with a few of Vanderveer's bonds for arguments, and offer to give him d'Avigne for satisfaction, on condition he does not listen to anything about Dodo of the Rue Laval. It will be easy for him to declare that he has reliable information that Dodo and Pierre Goidbeau are both dead."

"And I?"

"You are to help entrap d'Avigne."

"He is a devil. He will escape. Then what will my life be worth? He will find means to repay us both."

"Perhaps you have a better scheme. Go to him, then, and tell him my intentions. Perhaps he will make better terms with you. Perhaps you will fare better with the strangler than with me. Go!"

"Never! I would rather give myself over to

Ruel at once. It is bad to have him for an enemy—but to have you—God save me from that! I am with you, Dodo. Let us be rid of the strangler—forever.”

“Good! You are as wise as I believed. As for whatever he may do, I care not. I stake all on this throw. If you are not ready to risk too, don’t begin. The time has come to beat him if we can. If he beats us, then it is our fault.”

“Since when did you abandon François?”

“Since I began to suspect that he has destined me to the acquaintance of M. Finisterre. Besides——”

She smiles and taps her foot on the floor.

“Well?”

“Monsieur Vanderveer is handsome, do you not think so, Pierre?”

“I prefer his beauty to François’.”

“Bah! d’Avigne is a beast beside him. And he is rich, romantic, and aristocratic besides, Pierre. You hear that?”

“Certainly. I approve your choice, Dodo. I have said so before.”

“Pierre, do you remember the day when I drove you out of the pawnshop and swore that I hated you?”

“Very well indeed. Have I not still the marks of your nails where you wounded my cheek—you scratching cat!”

“And when I said that, you replied that you had feared that I loved you, and that you were mightily relieved to know that I only hated you.”

“Did I say that? I must then have been wise even in my youth,” laughs Pierre, half pleased to recall the incident.

“And I said that I could hate very well, as you should find—I was in a great passion then—but as for love, it was only for fools. You remember that?”

“Indeed I do. And you have lived up to it, too. It is a pity, because you are beautiful. But you have lived up to it.”

“But now, Pierre——”

Pierre stares again and waits.

“But now I have entirely changed my mind. Love is better than hate.”

"What do you mean? Oh! I see it all. *Pardieu!* So that is the cause for betraying Monsieur d'Avigne. So that is the reason for the scheme. You love Vanderveer. You love him! That is the secret of it all. I see!"

She drops her eyes before Goidbeau's searching glance and smiles, while there floats before her the memory of his divine face, and in her ears she hears the tones of his loved voice. She seems all a woman now, as Goidbeau looks at her in new amazement.

"Well, why not?" she resumes, rousing again from her little dream, and tossing her head airily. "Who can prevent? As I am to marry him it is the proper thing is it not?"

"Proper—but incredible. I will help you to defend the affection from the blight of François. He would be too jealous to let you live, I am sure. But your scheme grows on me. It is the thing to do. And you have the nerve to do it—the motive, too, I see. Afterward—well, what of me, afterward?"

"Oh! I have planned that too. If you go to South America and stay there I shall never travel that way. If you have money, which I will try to see you do not lack, you will find, I am sure, that the ladies of the tropics are charming beyond compare, and you may even follow my example—and fall in love."

"With money one can live without the love," says Pierre, dryly.

"Suit yourself. I promise you I will never be so curious as to inquire. That program will please you better, I am sure, than Finisterre's guillotine."

"By far, Dodo, by far! It is excellent!"

"And as for me, I am sure I can bury history—even memory—in the arms of Vanderveer."

CHAPTER XIII.

"A MAN IS WATCHING THIS HOUSE."

On that memorable night at Graystone when Godby's greed had led him to accept Dimitri Alvaroff's money and submit to being bound in his chair, his two prisoners stole cautiously out into the night, and, assisted by Vanderveer and Benonski, succeeded in boarding the little yacht which was in waiting for them. It was then deemed wiser for Harris and the Russian to return to the house to delay as long as possible the discovery of the flight.

Alvaroff being not only a very powerful but skilled sailor, they crossed to the point they had planned to make, not without great difficulty, however, as the storm had increased in its fury as the night wore on. Their one hope was to reach the house of a friend upon whom they could depend for further aid. To do this they must walk nearly a mile, and fearing to be impeded by its weight, Brauna left her cloak in the little craft, which her father moored to a stake driven in the muddy bottom of the inlet. The strong east wind veering to westward swept the yacht from its mooring, and, with the help of a strong ebb tide, it was soon carried out to sea. But with the returning tide and an onshore wind, the beached wreck told its own tale to a shocked and horrified world.

Struggling through the storm the wanderers at length reached the refuge they sought, where they found willing hands and true hearts to succor them in their distress.

A little rest, so sorely needed, and then on again, to elude their enemies, whom they believed to be searching for them, was the plan of Alvaroff and his persecuted daughter. But the flight and danger of that dreadful night, and of the few days following, told upon Brauna. Not daring to take to the rail, nor to any public conveyance, they travel only by night, sometimes in a little boat, creeping with the wind or against it, through the little bays and inlets that skirt Long Island nearly its entire length, sometimes over

the sandy roads, driven in a rude cart or farm wagon by some farmer or villager whom they hire to forward them on their journey.

The end of this kind of traveling came when Brauna, with fever burning in her face and veins, was obliged to stop. But they were a hundred miles from New York, and in a very obscure fishing hamlet by the water side reached by no railway and five miles from a telegraph line. Except for a few summer dwellers, or a sportsman with his gun, it would have been about as isolated from civilization as a shore in Alaska.

Here Alvaroff succeeded in finding a fisherman's family, having a little white cottage separated from the main portion of the straggling village, who were willing, in consideration of the generous fee offered, to take them in and give them shelter and entertainment for the few days they expected to remain. He represented that they were seeking a lonely resort purposely to escape the crowded watering-places, and had by intention omitted to bring along more than the merest necessities. Marcus the fisherman, and his wife, were simple and poor. When, after a few days, Brauna grew worse, her father began to be alarmed about her, but knowing something of medicine himself, and there being in the village the usual drug store, to which he could resort for remedies, he felt sure it was safer not to call in the local Esculapius, but for many days, almost sleepless, and with the anxiety of a great fear, Alvaroff cared for her while she hovered on the verge of death.

He was not surprised that no answer came from the letters Brauna wrote to Blanche and Vanderveer. He appreciated the fact that their friends would be unwilling to do anything that would endanger their safety. So they remained in entire ignorance of the fact that they were believed to have been drowned.

Alvaroff several times half resolved to communicate with Benonski, but on reflection decided that it might not be safe, as the Russian would naturally be watched. If he knew their whereabouts and should imprudently attempt to come to them it might only betray their hiding-place. "If Brauna recovers we

will flee to safer distances," he thinks, "where it will be more difficult to reach us, and then it will be time to communicate with Benonski."

Thus it happens that save the two letters which Blanche received, one for herself and one for Vanderveer inclosed, the fugitives remain in their safer silence as the weeks pass on.

But this solitude is at length penetrated and unveiled by one of those unfortunate accidents that are ever occurring in this strange world.

Ferrand Merki, or the man who has proved himself to be Ferrand Merki to the satisfaction of Count St. Mart Golfi, has attached to himself as companion in adventure a fellow named Valond.

Valond, who is necessary to Merki, shares with him the knowledge of the arrest and flight of the fugitives. He also knows the story of the murder of which the fair girl is accused. He has but lately arrived with his friend and master Ferrand Merki, in New York, and knows little of the country.

But when about the middle of September the weather in the city became very oppressive, and life grew dull to Valond, he asked permission to take a little out-of-door exercise with his rod and gun. Now it was a very little thing that the clerk at the hotel where Merki was staying should suggest Long Island as a very promising place for shore birds, and for various kinds of ducks. It was also a small matter that he happened to have an uncle living in the very same little hamlet where Brauna and her father had been detained. But it is upon slight things like this the dramas and tragedies of this life so often turn.

Valond borrowed the clerk's gun, and, following his directions, started off for the shore and the sands. His first day was nearly done, and a most discouraging one it had been, too, until, as he was returning, tired and cross just at dusk, to his delight and astonishment a large flock of black ducks came sweeping right over the village, and directly toward him, making for the great marsh where he had been skirmishing for hours for a single shot. He crouched in the opportune beach grass, and succeeded in bringing

down a duck with each barrel as they whirled by. The last one fell almost in the dooryard of a little white cottage near which he was. The owner of the cottage came out quickly at the noise of the gun and chided him soundly for disturbing the sick young lady in the house, whose life just now depended upon being kept perfectly quiet. Of course Valond apologized and walked away, hardly remembering at the moment that Marcus was volubly telling him that the sick young lady and her father were his guests from New York, and that they had been here detained by sickness for now six weeks or more.

Yet strange is the construction and operation of the human mind! No sooner was Valond beyond the view of Marcus than he stopped suddenly in the road, smitten motionless by a thought.

"It might be," says Valond, to himself. "It is improbable, of course, but as I am here I may as well investigate. He insists that they are dead, and he means to have the cash. He said a gentleman and his daughter. What else did he say? I remember it! He gabbled about his being a doctor. Now! Alvaroff figured as a doctor while he lived in New York. It grows interesting. If I should prove that I am right, then Merki will owe me one. It is improbable—but it is no harm to investigate."

That night Valond could not sleep. The thought dropped by fisherman Marcus haunted him. It would give him no peace. Even his ducks were driven from his mind.

Accordingly in the morning Valond began inquiries. He was cautious and made his researches skillfully. The morning had not ended before he found a clue that aggravated his desires. The local physician, who had heard that there was a sick young woman at fisherman Marcus's house, could not forgive the slight that he had not been called in on the case. He had slyly hinted that people who doctored themselves always had good reason for not being too public in their movements. This was enough, when it had been several times repeated, to cause some gossip by the village wiseacres and fools. Among them

he managed to find the man who had brought the fugitives in his farm wagon from a shore town across the neck to this place. He remembered the date very well. He also did not neglect to say to Valond that the man was white-haired and of aristocratic appearance, and that the young lady was very beautiful.

Valond had calculated the time, and knew that the arrival of the strangers at the house of fisherman Marcus made it yet more probable that they might be none other than Alvaroff and his daughter. The description also corresponded with his information. He followed up the matter slyly all day, talking at the post-office and the grocery store and wherever he might, with people whom he met. Before night the scent was hot, and he had made up his mind definitely that he had accidentally run down the game. He therefore took to watching the white cottage, and for the next three days attended to that matter so well that he had managed even to say "Good evening" to Alvaroff, and get a good look at him. Then seeing no other way to be certain, since he had never before seen the gentleman, Valond wrote a little note to Merki, asking him to send to his help a certain Ruoff. Ruoff was one of the servants who seized the supposed murderess as she stood over the slain man, stiletto in hand. Ruoff came, not knowing why he had been sent for. Merki himself had only guessed, because Valond was sharp enough not to reveal his unfinished suspicions. Merki only knew by Valond's letter that he had some important reason for sending.

Ruoff, with almost ghoulish delight, heard Valond's account, and before he had been in the place two days, managed to get a sight of Alvaroff. It was enough. The identification was absolute. Ruoff was for securing a local posse and seizing the game immediately. Not so Valond. He would have no such bungling with his master's business. He did not know what reasons his master might have for haste or for delay. He might not be ready. To act independently of Merki might ruin everything. He therefore sends Ruoff back to New York with a letter, and keeps his mouth tightly closed by a threat of Merki's anger. He him-

self remains. He resolves that Alvaroff shall not get out of his sight until he knows the will of Merki in the matter, and accordingly watches the cottage by day and night to be sure they do not give him the slip.

But Valond, who is of a nervous temperament and shortsighted—as most cunning people are who are no more than cunning—now overdoes his mission. He does not know that he is watching a brainy and skillful man, who is far more than his match in all the strategics of a contest of wits. He has not kept this thing up three days before Alvaroff knows that the house is watched. His caution has been sharpened by his experience, and when one night he sees from his window in the faint moonlight a dark figure stealing away into a clump of scrubby oaks near the house he began watching himself. Before long he has seen this figure a half dozen times, and has identified it with the sportsman of whom Marcus has spoken on several occasions. This discovery could not long be concealed from Brauna. She sees it almost immediately, in spite of his attempts at self-possession.

“What is it, dear father?” she asks him suddenly one day, from her couch.

“It is nothing, Brauna. A passing cloud. I only fancied you are not as well to-day. Am I right, dear?”

She smiles at him her soft and loving smile and answers:

“I see you are deceiving me. But I am better. If we are followed again I can bear to hear it. Tell me.”

Her quick intuitions had penetrated the truth without being told, and her father's silence answered the question.

“What have you seen then, papa? Is it very imminent?”

“A man watching this house, dear. But there is only one. Nothing will happen until there are more. By some fatal misfortune I fear we have been discovered. But it must not trouble you, dear. I will protect you.”

She was pallid with her long sickness, but her soul was strong even yet. Her father knew that she would bear all without failing. Her calmness reassured him. But Alvaroff made all his preparations against the danger that he saw impending. Brauna was slowly recovering, and was able now to sit in the sunshine a little indoors. Alvaroff, seeing that he must have help, resolved to use Marcus. He studied out a method and then set it going. Marcus was simple-minded, like other men of his calling, but liked money well enough. Alvaroff pretended to take him into confidence. He revealed to him with a great deal of secrecy in his manner that certain irregularities in his accounts with a certain bank made it disagreeable for him to go back to New York until he received a sum of money from his lands in Pennsylvania. He had reason to think that the bank would have him arrested. If he could keep out of their way a month longer he could settle up honorably. He would make it worth Marcus's while to help him. He revealed to Marcus that one of the bank detectives was watching the house, and soon proved it to him by ocular demonstration. The weeks in the house of Marcus had endeared both Alvaroff and his daughter to the affections of the fisherman and his wife. Alvaroff represented that his arrest now would perhaps kill Brauna. He re-enforced his arguments liberally with cash. Fisherman Marcus agreed to secure, very secretly and cautiously, a small sailboat belonging to a neighbor, and to stock it with the necessary things for a trip across the Sound to the Rhode Island shore. Meanwhile he is to watch closely for the possible arrival of strangers in the village.

Alvaroff believes that there is as yet but one person engaged in watching the house. He infers that this means danger only if they attempt to move. So long as they show no alarm they are not to be seized at present. But the blow may fall at any moment. He intends to take no chances of immediate pursuit. He has learned Valond's habits and sets his snare for him. Thinking himself very sly, Valond has no idea that he has been discovered, and is waiting quietly for Merki

to act. Merki has replied to his letter immediately, commending his shrewdness in making the discovery and his diplomacy in waiting for orders, and promising to effect the recapture of the fugitives as soon as he can finish certain negotiations with Golfi. He directs Valond to keep a close watch and inform him of everything instantly.

But, lurking about the fisherman's house, one night he suddenly comes to grief.

CHAPTER XIV.

“IT IS TIME TO BE RID OF THE SPY.”

Alvaroff calculated his movements so carefully that his success was immediate. He concealed himself under the shadows of a clump of scrub oaks near the place which he had located as the lurking ground of Valond. It was Valond's cue to make an inspection of the premises every night, to discover and forestall any preparations for a removal. He was getting a little tired of these vigils, and thought Merki was too slow in acting. True, he assures Merki by daily letters that the game is safe, and that there is no danger of immediate action, as the girl is too weak to be removed. As a matter of fact, Alvaroff, on discovering that the house is being watched, gives it out through Marcus that his daughter is worse and not likely to recover, hoping that this would delay his enemies. This report was faithfully repeated in the letters of Valond, and Merki was taking more time than he otherwise would, as a consequence. He thought, if Brauna died, his way would be even yet easier.

Valond, coming to his nightly inspection, which he had been directed to make without failure by Merki, had hardly settled in his hiding place to wait for the lights to go out before beginning his customary prowling tour around the premises, when he suddenly heard a slight sound behind him, and before he could

breath, was hurled violently to the sands. Before he could begin to understand what had befallen him, his head was buried in a heavy shawl, and Alvaroff was binding him fast, in spite of his struggles, in cords that soon disabled him from all harm. Then, jerking the fellow to his feet and removing the shawl, Alvaroff remarked, sternly:

"There, my man, perhaps you will now tell me why you are lurking about here so much. There are safer places for you."

Valond is quick-witted, and rapidly recovers his self-possession. He is not deceived by Alvaroff's question. After getting his breath a little he says, with a short laugh, as if he cared nothing about the matter:

"Why, what harm have I done? I am merely a gunner. Several times I have seen an owl on that haystack after nightfall. I thought I would try to get him for a specimen. Why do you attack me thus? I will complain of you."

"It is useless for you to lie. You write the progress of your vigils daily to New York. The letters are directed to Michael Ruoff. Michael Ruoff is the creature who once belonged to Merki. That means that you are in the employ of my enemies. You know me, and are here to give the signal when I am to be seized. You will never give that signal. Come along with me and I will show you why."

He pulls Valond along into the house, explaining to his daughter in a few words the capture of the spy.

Brauna, quiet, beautiful as an angel in her coming health, and almost able again to move with her accustomed spirits, rises and signifies that she is ready to begin their new flight. Marcus, with his boat, is waiting at a little inlet below the house to take them to the larger craft in readiness.

"And I have decided to take you along, you hound," says Alvaroff, turning to Valond. "I intend to see to it that you are put beyond the chance of betraying us as you intended. Go before me as we walk, and if you do not walk as I direct, I will regulate your movements with this."

Valond saw a little revolver gleam in his captor's

hand. He knew something of this man's history, and has learned more of his activity since nightfall, as well as of the strength of his arms. The revolver was not to be argued with, and he placed himself in front of Alvaroff, his hands still bound, ready for the walk.

He saw no chance to escape on the way, and in ten minutes, with Marcus at the oars, they were gliding out of the inlet. In ten more they were on board the sailboat. Marcus had already hoisted the sail, and had only to raise his kedge anchor, and haul taut the main sheet, and the wind swept them swiftly and smoothly out into the rougher waters of the Sound.

Valond was silent, wondering what they would do with him. He thought it was sharp of Alvaroff to abduct him and take him along, thus preventing him from giving the alarm in New York. But unless he was killed outright he did not see how they were to deal with him so as to save that possibility even now. But his speculations were ended after they had sailed an hour.

"Bring her up into the wind and lie to for a little," says Alvaroff to Marcus. Then in a louder tone he adds: "It is time to be rid of the spy."

Valond moves uneasily in his seat. "To be rid of the spy!" Does that mean something horrible? Will this stern man secure himself from all chance of Valond's reports by a desperate deed?

"Tell me, now, miserable wretch, why I should not silence your tongue as we end the life of a kitten in a sack—tell me?"

Valond's teeth chattered in the cool night, not from cold entirely, as he managed to answer, in a frightened tone:

"You mean to murder me? Don't do that now. I only obey my orders."

"Orders! That is what I wish to know. Whose orders? Before I leave you here forever in this wash of the sea, I command you to tell me who it is that, after seven years, has undertaken to hunt down my daughter for a crime which she did not commit. Tell me."

"I will. But not until you promise to let me go. I don't fancy being drowned. I won't speak until you _____,"

"Give me the rope, Marcus," says Alvaroff, in a sharp, stern voice. "It is useless to dally with a man who is mean enough to serve as a spy. The world is well rid of such vermin. I will tie his feet also. Meanwhile he may reflect that it were better to die after having done a good deed by informing me of that which I wish to know. Are you going to speak?"

"Not if you intend to drown me," says Valond doggedly, seeing but this one frail chance of escaping with his life. "If you spare my life I will tell all I know. I will also promise not to go back to those who sent me here."

"Stupid wretch! Are you then so idiotic as to suppose that I could rely on a promise from such as you. But tell me what I ask, and we will at least let you live until you reach shore. After that we will consider it."

"Very well, then. It is Golfi."

"Golfi. Ah! He has escaped? He has returned?"

"Returned, and is in New York. He commands the American department of the Moscow League."

"That may be. But why does he hate me? Why should he follow me, or her?"

"It is you he strikes at. You should know why."

"I? I know nothing. Golfi was sent with the others to Siberia. I heard he was knouted and died under that dreadful punishment."

"He was knouted—he did not die. He hates you, and will have your life. That is the truth. He has found out about the murder, so he strikes you first through her."

Valond jerks his head in the direction of the dark, cloaked figure in the stern who was not near enough to hear this conversation above the noise of the dashing waves.

"I know not what it means in the least. Who are you, then, and what is your relation to Golfi—and why does Golfi follow us?"

"Because you betrayed the patriots at the Bouski Plaza into the hands of the Czar's officers. Count St. Mart Golfi suffered in Siberia. His back is ridged with the marks of the knout until he dies. You are the cause."

"As God hears me, it is a lie! I myself was warned and fled just in time to escape the Czar's minions. I betray? I, who gave everything for the cause of the patriots—until the plot failed! Not so. Golfi is deceived. I have my own idea who was the man that gave the information to Russia. But it was not Alvaroff. I see it all. So this is the secret of the pursuit! I am glad to know it. I shall now know the proper course to take. Are you a Nihilist, then—one of Golfi's men?"

Valond was not frightened enough to lead him to tell the truth. He knows something of the situation—enough, at least, to be sure that Merki would not be pleased to have the fact that he was still living revealed to Alvaroff, as yet. Valond knew more than this, and he shaped his lies according to his knowledge. He reflected a moment and then replied:

"Yes. Why else should I be here? Golfi will hunt you down if he can, be sure of that."

"That is to be seen. He may repent. He may discover that it was some other to whom he owes the misfortunes of Siberia."

"But as I have told you what you wish to know, I will thank you to take me ashore. I promise not to return to Golfi. I am not obliged to."

"I have some idea you will not find it pleasant. He will not easily overlook this episode in your career, will he?"

Valond caught at this hint and said, very earnestly:

"That is the very thing. I don't fancy being disciplined for a slip that I could not help."

"Do whatever you like. Marcus, bring the tender alongside." Then, turning to Valond, his captor adds, grimly: "I am about to set you adrift in this boat. It is five miles at least to either shore. You will not get at either the telegraph or the train before morning. If you think with that start it will be

easy for Golfi, or any other, to find us, keep your own opinion, and compare it with the result. I bid you a safe row to the shore."

He motions Valond to the little boat, and that gentleman did not stay on the order of his going, but at once clambered into it and was lost to sight in five minutes, as the sailboat took the wind again and kept on her way across the Sound.

Valond, left in his boat, allowed her to drift in the wind. He sat in a daze for some time, hardly able to convince himself that he was awake. Suddenly he remembers Merki. He does not feel in haste to report his adventure. Then he bent to the oars, going the easiest way, and landed after daylight on a rocky point of the Connecticut shore. He stood up for a moment and watched the boat drift away into the water.

"It is a good idea," he says to himself. "If I do not reappear Merki may think I have been destroyed by his enemy. The boat will be found by somebody. As it belongs on the other side, and as I shall have disappeared, it will sooner or later be thought over there that I am drowned. I will give Merki the slip until it is convenient to turn up again. I can invent some lies for him if I ever find it convenient to make his acquaintance again."

CHAPTER XV.

"HE LOVED YOU, YOU LOVED HIM."

Some four months after the misfortune which befel Valond, Benonski was made nearly wild with joy by receiving through the mails this brief message:

"Come to 601 Eighty-second Street. Caution."

He knows the writing. It is his master's, and it is in the cipher of the Moscow League. Benonski had nearly abandoned his hope that they were alive after these months of waiting. At best he had felt but a

faint, stubborn hope that they had escaped the waves of the ocean and might be somewhere in hiding. But when the weeks went by and he heard nothing, hope gradually faded, and he mourned them as lost to him forever. Now Benonski, being alone, swings his arms about and gives a shout of joy. Then, without waiting for anything, he starts off for the designated street, being very careful, however, that no one observes him going. For the Russian had been aware that for a time he had been closely watched; but of late nothing of the kind had occurred.

At length he reaches the house and, with anxious and turbulent feelings, rings the bell. In a minute more he stands in their presence. Faithful devotee! He can not restrain himself, and weeps tears of joy on seeing them.

"Oh! And how beautiful you grow," he says to Brauna, devouring her with his eyes. "It is payment for all my grief to know that you live—both of you. But why do you come here? It is not safe. They will find you. Surely you will go away at once again. And I will go with you. The devils! But we will never again get in their clutches. So! You were not drowned, then?"

"Drowned!"

"Drowned. Yes; on the yacht. Have you not heard, then? Did you not know that we all believed you at the bottom of the sea? Oh! And did it not well nigh break the heart of us all? It is strange that—no, on the whole how should you know? But tell me, then, how the yacht got to sea—and your cloak, Miss Brauna?"

Then Benonski tells them of the wrecked yacht and the finding of Brauna's cloak, and how they had been given up as lost at sea.

"But you have been informed? Brauna wrote. Did not Mr. Vanderveer tell you?"

"Mr. Vanderveer? Not a word. On the contrary, he believes you dead. He—— Well, I have not seen him in some time."

There is a slight chill in Benonski's tone that Brauna does not fail to catch, and she pales a little.

She looks into his face as she asks in a low tone, repressing the tumult arising in her soul:

"Do you mean that Mr. Vanderveer did not receive my letter? Are you quite sure?"

"No; I have not seen him lately, as I say. But if he had received news that you are living, he would not have kept it from me—unless——"

"Well, Benonski?"

Benonski hangs his head and does not speak.

Brauna sighs. She is proud, and does not wish even before this trusted friend and servant to show her heart too plainly. She sits down, with a little look of terror on her face. What does it mean? Vanderveer thinks her dead. Or knowing that she still lives he makes no sign. What does it mean? It never for a moment occurs to her that dear Blanche could fail her.

"The truth is, Benonski, that Brauna wrote to him as soon as we were well in secure hiding. We hardly expected he would risk our safety by answering, or by attempting to find us. But that he has not confided in you—that he has not professed to know that we live——"

"I can not say that master. He went back into society soon and I have not seen him. That is all. Perhaps he knows very well. But that you will soon learn, as I shall see to it that he knows that you are here—or that he is informed of your whereabouts wherever you go. But perhaps you will tell me your plans."

"Do not inform Mr. Vanderveer at present," says Brauna. "First ascertain if he received the letter. Benonski, I trust you, do I not?"

"If I thought you did not then would life be of no more value to me," replies Benonski, bowing very low, and sighing as if the thought grieved him.

"Then I may speak plainly on a delicate subject to you. You are more than a servant, a mere employee—you are a friend. You know our misfortunes, and you do not believe that I am justly accused."

"On the contrary, I have the best of reasons for thinking that you are a martyr of circumstances. You may trust me."

"You are not blind to that which goes on about you, Benonski. You know the—the relation between Mr. Vanderveer and myself."

"Yes. He loved you. You loved him. Yes."

"And if he no longer loves me—can you find that out too—before you open to him our present condition. If he received the letter—you can ascertain that, can you not?"

"Without doubt. I will know before three days go by."

"And how he feels toward me. Understand I do not wish to make any approaches toward—toward renewing our acquaintance if he has ceased to care. But if he failed to get the letter then he, like you, may still believe that we were drowned. You see the situation, Benonski."

Benonski drops his eyes. There is something he has not told.

"Tell me all you know," says Brauna, with a smile, and in a firm voice.

"Nothing at all," says Benonski. "I have only heard just once, and quite by chance, that Vanderveer is much sought after and that he is liable to fall a victim to some creature or other. But it is rumor, my dear lady."

"Is that all?"

"All, on my word. There is nothing more definite. I have taken no pains to follow him up. I think a man who is so soon off with——"

"Stop, Benonski! I will hear no evil of him—neither now or at any time."

She flushes, and her eyes gleam with loyal resentment. Benonski is wise enough not to attempt to finish his criticism.

Alvaroff then explains in detail the escape in the yacht and their experiences in the fisherman's cottage. Benonski measures the situation in the light of this narration, and again asks anxiously:

"But what will you do now? New York is not safe."

"On the contrary, if we are discreet, New York may be the safest place there is," replies Alvaroff.

"My enemies will hardly look for us here. We can keep indoors, and go out only in disguise or at night. I hope to break down this pursuit if I can have a little time. If this man Golfi can be convinced that it was not I who betrayed the patriots seven years ago he will not follow us. I think that may be accomplished. It is to this we are now to bend our energies."

"And remain here?"

"Yes; if you are discreet, you will be able to aid us and still not endanger us. Besides, both my daughter and myself have decided that we will flee no more. Life is too poor as fugitives and suspects to be worth keeping. If we are to be hunted to death by our enemies we will defy them when the time comes that we must, and do the best we can."

"In heaven's name! I adjure you do not think of such a course. They will surely kill you both. Stay here if you think it best—but do not let them seize you again. Be ready at any moment to disappear. They can not always follow. If life is not valuable here go to other lands—far beyond the pursuit of this Golfi—if it is he who follows you."

"We have decided," Alvaroff replies, firmly. "We will never flee again. We will avoid the enemy as long as we can—and you, Benonski, shall help us. Meanwhile, we will attend to the task of drawing his fangs. Meantime, you can send a note to Mr. Vanderveer, asking him where you can see him, as you have some important information to communicate."

Thus it happens that Godby, who is on the watch like a cat over Vanderveers' mail, and who by this time is sufficiently in the confidence of the careless fellow to be permitted to open all business correspondence, about three days before the appointed wedding day comes upon Benonski's note.

He remembers the name instantly, and at once scenting danger, takes the letter to Miss Evanston without delay.

"It means danger, Pierre," she says, with a fierce look at him. "Come! If this Benonski is not answered at once he will look Vanderveer up. He has found out that they are alive."

"Exactly," assents Pierre. "My head for it, this Benonski has had word from them. Just three days too early, Dodo dear."

"Yes. Three days!" she repeats, with a gentle smile. "Three days, Pierre! How I pray that nothing will postpone the happy day," she sighs, then, after a moment's reflection, demands:

"You can answer letters for Vanderveer as well as read them, I suppose."

"The devil! You mean I am to answer Benonski's letter?"

"Certainly. Use the typewriter. Sign his name the best you can. This Benonski knows nothing of Vanderveer's chirography, of course. It is not necessary to be an expert in this case."

"True, Dodo. What shall I write?"

"Say that important business will prevent him from attending to Benonski's matter before Thursday. Make an appointment for Thursday noon."

"Capital. But to guard against accidents. Suppose he is not satisfied?"

"It is worth considering. He might be impatient and hunt Vanderveer out. That would not be to our liking. Let me think. Have you any comrades whom you can trust with a matter—say fellows who will do a thing and not ask disagreeable questions?"

Blanche looks at him with her bland smile, which tells him she has some fine plot in her pretty head.

"Perhaps. There are Riggs and Levi. You know them."

"Very well. Give them twenty dollars apiece, and tell them there is as much more where that comes from when they are through. Then instruct them."

"After you, Dodo. Tell me the plan."

"Write the Russian that Vanderveer is about to go to—say any place fifty miles out—Connecticut or New Jersey. Make an appointment with Benonski there. Say that he will be gone until Thursday, but that he is so curious to know the meaning of Benonski's note that he will gladly pay the expense if he will only go and meet him there. When he arrives Riggs and Levi will be there. They will have a note

from Vanderveer which you will furnish them. He will get into a carriage with them to be taken where Vanderveer is. He will be detained. On Thursday or Friday he will get away, and return to New York, wondering why he has been dealt with in that abrupt manner. His wonder will be a trifle late."

"Excellent! It shall be done! Give me the whole detail."

Blanche smiles, and then for an hour she drills Pierre. Every detail of the plot is gone over, and when Pierre at last goes to his lodgings he has a good deal of confidence that this new danger is removed, or at least effectually provided against.

The next morning Benonski receives a cordial little note signed "Vanderveer," informing him that the writer is obliged to take train for a little village below Perth Amboy, and urging him to follow at once to relieve his anxiety that has been awakened by Benonski's note. "I feel," the letter reads, "that it must be something about the lost ones. Come without delay if possible. I will arrange to have some one at the station to meet you."

Elated at receiving this note, the Russian loses no time, managing to catch the next train.

On this same morning a lovely, sad woman, looking over the morning papers with her father, suddenly grows pallid and drops the sheet from her hand with a cry of pain. Quickly picking up the journal, to which she points with a growing anguish in her face, Alvaroff reads:

"The wedding of Mr. Harris Vanderveer with Miss Blanche Evanston, daughter of Dr. Paul Evanston, of Chicago, is announced to occur at St. John's Church, Wednesday, at noon."

"He has deserted me," she moans, covering her face with her hands, as she sinks into her father's arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

"JAMES SMITH, AT YOUR SERVICE, SIR."

Benonski, in his eagerness to reach Vanderveer, misreads the name of the village where he is directed to go. His ticket carries him over another road, twenty miles farther than the town to which Riggs and Levi had gone to intercept him. He reaches the station near dark, having telegraphed in advance the train upon which he would travel. He finds that his telegram has not been delivered, and that no one answering his description of Vanderveer has been seen at the place. Being too late to return to town that night, he passes the evening wondering how he could have blundered so. In the morning he takes the early train back to New York, thinking that it will be better to go directly to Vanderveer's office, where he can probably learn how he can reach that gentleman.

When, therefore, Benonski appears at the office and inquires for Mr. Vanderveer, Godby—alias Mr. Smith—promptly appears. He was watching like a cat over every circumstance, and it would have been nearly impossible for any visitor to have seen Vanderveer in these days without first passing through the hands of "Mr. Smith." The task is easier now because Harris is not at his office at all during this week of preparation. To-morrow is to be his wedding day. Godby has to take care of matters but for a few days more, and all will be well.

Godby at once recognizes Benonski, and is startled to know that his scheme has fallen through.

"Excuse me,—but do you represent Mr. Vanderveer in his absence?" asks Benonski, eying the man before him with the dim idea that he has seen him before.

"Certainly. James Smith, at your service. What can I do for you?"

"Mr. Vanderveer is absent from the city, I believe. I called to learn the name of the place to which he has gone."

"Ah? And what might I call—your name, please?"

"Benonski."

"Can't say, Mr. Benonski," replies Godby, with a bland smile. "You have business with Mr. Vanderveer? Sorry he is out of town for a few days."

"Yes. He wrote me as much. I went after him yesterday on his appointment. I must have gone to the wrong place. I failed to find him."

"Oh, you are the gentleman then," says Godby, brightening, as if pleased. "I remember hearing him dictate the letter to you—to the typewriter. You were to go on where he is. I am sure he was very anxious to see you, too. Sorry you missed him. Mr. Vanderveer seemed to remember you as an old friend, I believe."

"We were acquaintances a time ago," says Benonski, cautiously. "If you will be so good as to write him a little note, and give me his correct address, I think I will try again."

"Certainly. With great pleasure. When will you start?"

"There is a train at noon, if I have the right place at last. I misread it before. I merely wish to be made certain this time."

Curiously at this very moment a district messenger boy enters the office with a telegram, which he gives to Godby. He opens and reads:

"No birds flying yet. Shall we wait? Riggs."

He turns to Benonski, tearing the telegram in pieces as he does so, and says with instant wit that comes like an inspiration:

"It is funny, Mr. Benonski, but this telegram comes—wait a minute, messenger. This is from Mr. Vanderveer himself, sir. He says you have not appeared, and that if you call to say that he is very anxious to have you come. Singular! Shall I wire him that you will go at noon?"

"Do so if you please, Mr. Smith."

Godby took a blank from the messenger and wrote:

"A Russian bird will fly at 12 M. Watch for him. No. 33."

But, pretending to read the message aloud, he read as follows:

“Vanderveer. Benonski goes on the noon train. Has just called. Meet him. Smith.”

He folds the message ostentatiously, and puts it in the envelope for the messenger, as he says, turning to the Russian:

“Your business can not, perhaps, be done by mail? I am Mr. Vanderveer’s manager in the office. Any ordinary matter—even many confidential matters—he conducts through me. However, the message is gone, anyway.”

It has occurred to Godby that he might find out something by quizzing his caller. He has only guessed that Benonski’s errand means that the fugitives have communicated. Perhaps he will be able to confirm the impression.

“It is not a matter that a third party can well attend to,” answers Benonski.

“It will do as well to see him, doubtless,” assents Godby, cunningly. “I shall, however, be happy to give you any hints that might serve you. I believe Mr. Vanderveer’s business in New Jersey is of a somewhat delicate nature.”

Godby is experimenting. He hopes to indirectly draw the Russian out by exciting his curiosity.

“I presume it does not concern me, Mr. Smith,” says Benonski, as if he had not the slightest interest in this cunning hint. Nevertheless it has occurred to him that perhaps he might learn something of interest to a certain beautiful woman whose servant and devotee he is. The bait therefore has irresistibly attracted him. He does not immediately go out, and Godby exults to believe that he has succeeded in exciting his interest.

“No. But if you are going to see him I might suggest that you might possibly embarrass him. It is a case of some lady, I believe.”

“Ah!” says Benonski, with face darkening a little. “Then perhaps he is not so anxious to see me as he pretends?”

"On the contrary—I infer from his manner, and some remarks that he dropped while dictating the letter, that he expects you to give him some important information. I assumed that it is about investments. He will have time to attend to money-making, I suppose, whatever he is doing."

"Mr Vanderveer is much given to society, I believe. Such was once the case. He is called very handsome."

"More than ever, I think. You see, he was engaged to a girl at one time who turned out badly in some way. They thought at one time she had drowned herself, but it seems she turned up again. Vanderveer cared for her a good deal, it is said. Since then he has been forgetting her by a large amount of social dissipation. In fact, he has come to leave about all his business to my care. Perhaps you know about this, Mr. Benonski."

"She drowned herself, you say? Oh! She turned up, then? He knows she—excuse me, Mr. Smith—but did you say that Mr. Vanderveer believes this—this person turned out badly? I am interested. If there is no objection I would like to hear about the matter. Vanderveer is a friend."

"On the whole, I reproach myself for gossiping about my employer's affairs. Still, it is public matter, Mr. Benonski. Thought you might have heard it."

"Not I. But pray do not violate any confidence, Mr. Smith, to satisfy my impertinent curiosity. It must have been a shock to him and his friends. She would have committed suicide, I think you said."

"Oh! He makes no confidant of me in his affairs of the heart. I only remember when he heard she was living—some letter that he received—he was in the office here! Some said he had found some woman who pleased him better, and some said she was such a character that he discarded her on that account. I never knew the rights of the matter. I only know that he has some unusually strong attraction out in Jersey where he is now. I just give you the hint to save you from intruding in any way."

The faithful servant's heart is very heavy as he

thinks, "How can I ever tell her?" but he makes a good attempt to conceal his feelings from the smiling Mr. Smith, to whom he is even grateful for the information.

"I should thank you, I suppose, for warning me how the land lies," he says, not entirely able to hide his feelings. "I will endeavor not to disturb Mr. Vanderveer's lovemaking in Jersey. If I should, he will know that I have the best of motives," he remarks, as he takes his departure.

The spy has not found out whether Benonski is the bearer of news from the fugitives, but he is satisfied with his work. He realizes that after this the fair Brauna will not trouble Vanderveer, if indeed Benonski has the chance to communicate the lies to her.

Leaving Vanderveer's office, Benonski remembers that he has promised to bring Brauna word of her sweetheart—to find out whether he still loves her. And he can only tell her the subtle and poisonous lies of Godby.

He lifts his eyes to mark his way in the streets. Then suddenly his thoughts are sent whirling to chaos. He is turning the corner from Broadway, and face to face with him is a pedestrian, whom he is about to meet. On his face is a scar. His arms are long, his hands brawny, his motions like those of a cat. At his figure Benonski stares, with face paling like the face of the dead. It is Merki!

CHAPTER XVII.

"HAVE I SEEN A GHOST, THEN?"

Merki does not in turn see Benonski—at least, seeing him he gives no sign of recognition. But the faithful friend of the Alvaroffs, pale as marble, staggers against a near support, and looks after Merki with dilating and horrified eyes, until the latter, walking rapidly, turns the near corner and disappears.

"My God! Have I seen a ghost, then?" exclaims

Benonski, trembling and sweating in the paroxysm of a great astonishment and fear. Then he rushes quickly to the corner and stares after Merki.

"It is the same walk—like a cat pacing. The scar—the scar on his cheek—the long arms—two such men never lived. It is his ghost."

Benonski, ejaculating thus under his breath, and seized with a burning impulse to fathom the mystery, creeps on after Merki, watching him with growing wonder.

Merki walks down the street until he meets a street car, which he boards, and is soon lost to Benonski's view. Benonski's first impulse is to follow him, but he refrains from doing so at length, and stops near a bookstall to think. By this time he is burning with a hot flush of excitement, his whole soul stirred by what he had seen.

"It was no ghost. It was a man. It was Ferrand Merki. Bah! It was no such thing. Did I not see Ferrand Merki in his shroud? Some one else in the world is like him—that is all. That can not be either. Heavens! He may not have been dead at all. Was it not some trick? How he startled me! I will go at once and tell them what I have seen."

With his mind in this whirl, Benonski rushes off to the elevated road and takes his way uptown. He was moved by the single resolve to unbosom himself to his friends. They may even show him that it is possible that Ferrand Merki really could be alive. And if they could then would all their danger be over.

So in a half hour Benonski rushes in upon them breathless, bursting with his startling discovery.

"Wait, sir. I have seen a ghost, master Alvaroff. A ghost, I tell you," he breaks out, as soon as he can speak. "Ferrand Merki! I tell you he is not dead. I have seen him. I have seen him—this very morning. Master he lives—he lives!"

"Stop, Benonski, stop!" returns Alvaroff. "What are you raving about? Calm yourself and tell me. What of Ferrand Merki?"

"I have seen him, I tell you. On Broadway—this very day. Think you I would not know that wretch

anywhere on earth? He is the same cat. He has the scar—he has the gait, arms, eyes, everything. I tell you it is he.”

“Nonsense, Benonski. You have merely seen some one who resembles him. Merki is dead. He was murdered by my daughter’s stiletto more than seven years ago. Let us not talk about it then. What you imagine is impossible.”

“But he may not have died. How do you know that he died? You never saw him dead—with your own eyes.”

“But I did,” broke in Brauna. “It would be worse to know that he lives even than to be accused of his death. In that case I should be his wife. But I agree with papa. He is dead long ago. If you saw some one it was not Merki.”

“Then I am dead myself, and have seen his shade,” cries Benonski, persistently. “I tell you that this very hour I saw that devil of the Moscow days—saw him face to face. He was nearer to me than you are at this instant. Think you I could ever forget? Have I not carried the memory of his face forever before my eyes? I tell you he lives. It is true you saw him, my lady—but not after he was in the hands of the coroners. What if they may have found life in him? I have heard of such things. He was a hateful and malignant wretch, was he not? Oh! Have you not wondered, then, why you are hunted after all these years? What if he is alive? Who, tell me, would be heir if you and my mistress here were put out of the way? It is he! It is Ferrand Merki who lives and is keeping back—and urging on this persecution. I believe it, I believe it! I tell you I saw him!”

“It is a wild idea,” says Alvaroff, thoughtfully. “It might by some miracle be true. But how can you believe it? You have told me a hundred times that you have seen what neither I nor my daughter saw—Ferrand Merki at the coroner’s place, dead and stark as a stone. Of course he was. Dead men do not come back, Benonski. You have seen some one else.”

“It is true I saw the body of Merki. But it was

evening. I thought I saw plainly that he was dead. But I was mistaken. I now believe with all my soul that I must have been mistaken. Who else would trouble to follow you two after this long time? Tell me that!"

"Golfi. It is Golfi, as the fellow Valond has told me, who thinks I am the traitor who betrayed the Moscow League."

"But that does not explain why anybody hunts down my fair mistress. Golfi would not strike that way unless he was working for some other end. But if he is in company with Merki—then all would be clear."

Now this argument, earnestly struck out by Benonski, curiously enough runs in precisely the same channels with the reasonings which Alvaroff himself has worked out before. The statement of Valond had seemed at first entirely to explain their danger. But since that time Alvaroff, again and again recurring to the situation, has reasoned that it is singular that a man like Golfi should take a method so indirect to wreak his revenge. And all the circumstances seem to point to other motives. True, Golfi might plot for Brauna's arrest, but it would only be in order to bring Alvaroff to grief. If Golfi alone had been working then when their hiding place had been discovered, it would have been far more probable that Golfi would seize him secretly, and in his own person wreak the revenge he sought.

"What you say, Benonski, is very incredible and very improbable," says Alvaroff, at length. "Nevertheless it is worth thinking about. As you have said, everybody may have been deceived about the death of Merki. If he recovered from those wounds which the physicians declared went to his heart, then he would have good motives for remaining out of our sight, and concealing the fact of his existence. He could not reach us years ago, for we had fled to a secure hiding. But on the whole it is far more probable that you have been deceived by a resemblance. Merki died. Let him be."

Realizing that his master is not to be convinced

by any further affirmations, Benonski abruptly changes the conversation by saying:

"Very well. I am about to take a train to Jersey to see——"

He does not finish, but Alvaroff, and much better Brauna, knows whom he means.

"It is not necessary, my faithful fellow," she says, in a low, firm tone. "I have found out all I desire to know. Stay with us. We are about to go away again."

"Go away?" he echoes.

"Tell him, papa," she says, as she quietly leaves the room.

"Vanderveer is not worthy such a woman, Benonski. I am disappointed in him. We have learned that he is to be married—to-morrow. She wishes to leave New York this afternoon or in the morning. Can you blame her?"

"Damn his eyes!" said Benonski, savagely. "I think I will carry out my first intention. It will be a good thing."

"Intention, Benonski?"

"Yes—to choke this elegant rascal soundly. I can do it, and be back here before morning."

"Soft, Benonski! It may be conceded that we have some provocation for the choking—but you will refrain. You were going to Jersey, you say?"

"Yes. I have learned something. The story of the wedding does not surprise me. But I had not heard that."

"She found it in the morning paper. Poor girl!"

"That then is the reason for his absence in New Jersey. Call her back, and I will tell what I have learned."

Brauna, returning, sits down wearily, listening while Benonski, as gently as he can, relates what he has learned from "Mr. Smith."

"He knows, then! He has deserted me with a full knowledge that I am living. I am glad to know it. I hope he will be happy with her. But I do not understand why he is in New Jersey. Perhaps Blanche is there also. It does not matter."

Thus the poison sinks in, and the sting of it is like death.

Benonski advised that there be no haste in getting away from New York. He pretended to argue plausibly that as long as they were here it would be best to make a good effort at least, as Alvaroff had suggested, to break down Golfi's belief in the falsehood he was evidently pursuing. This clue Alvaroff is himself disposed to follow, and agreed with Benonski, promising to attempt to induce Brauna to give up the idea of leaving the city immediately.

But Benonski, in fact, cared not a whit any more about the movements and intentions of this shadowy Golfi. He has argued for remaining in New York because he has conceived a sudden and unalterable purpose. He means to find Ferrand Merki, and prove that he lives. He has decided with all the force of his stubborn mind that the man he has seen is no other than Merki. He can not explain how the miracle has been wrought, but the evidence of his senses and his memory is indisputable, and overcomes all sense of the improbabilities in the case.

As soon as he is out of the house he sets at work, He first telegraphs to Vanderveer that he will not be able to keep the appointment in New Jersey.

Then goes to the offices of the *World*, the *Herald*, and the *Sun*, and causes to be inserted the following personal:

“Ferrand Merki: If you desire to know where they are hiding, use the cipher in this paper. There is nothing without Liberty.”

Then he waits for results.

This evening Harris Vanderveer calls for the last time on his fiancée. To-morrow she will be his bride. She is more charming than he had ever seen her before. Her spirits are contagiously high, and she makes him impatient for the hour when he can call her his own.

He dallies in her fascinating presence like a bird charmed by the eyes of a serpent, until she says, very coquettishly:

"You must leave me now, dear heart. The hour is very late, and Auntie will be shocked if you remain longer."

"Till to-morrow, then, he cries, his soul in his voice. "My darling, good-by."

As he leaves the house he does not notice a rather rough-looking man on the opposite side of the street, who, on seeing Harris come out, crosses at once, following closely as he hastens down the side street to catch his downtown car.

As Vanderveer reaches Columbus Avenue the man taps him on the shoulder, saying:

"Shure an I'd loike ter spake to yez, soir."

Vanderveer, a bit startled, turns, saying:

"Well my man, what is it?"

"It's meself, soir, what can tell yez a little sacret, be-gorra. Come inside, now," the man replies, as he points to the little "all-night" restaurant on the corner where they are now standing.

Vanderveer is in such a happy state of mind he feels kindly toward all the world at this time, and thinking the man simply wants a meal at his expense, and as he does not see any car, he laughingly steps inside the little restaurant, thinking it will be amusing, perhaps, to see how the man, who has something of the air of a wag about him, will ask for his supper.

As they enter there are no other customers about, and leading the way half down the narrow room, the man drops into a chair, saying, quietly:

"Please sit down, Mr. Vanderveer. I wish to speak with you."

"John Waters!" exclaims Harris, in astonishment, recognizing his voice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THERE WILL BE NO WEDDING."

"Yes," answers Waters. "We met last by the sea. I believed then that it might be for the last time. But it has become necessary for me to make some inquiries. Your wedding is announced,"

"Well," returns Vanderveer, very haughtily.

Vanderveer is recalled by the presence of Waters to the memory of the share this man had in the arrest. He does not intend to discuss his own affairs with a detective. He assumes a chilly air at once that Waters notices.

"I am not congratulating you, Mr. Vanderveer. I am not deceived, however, by the announcement, am I? Believe me, I have very good reasons for asking."

"I do not care to be interviewed by you, Mr. Waters. If you please."

He would even have risen from his seat to go, but Waters said, coldly, in a voice that arrested him at once:

"But I wish to talk with you. Sit still and listen. It will be better than to regret it later. I desire to talk with you about your intended marriage."

"And I do not desire to talk with you about anything. You do not interest me, Mr. Waters."

"I will try to do so before I am done. You offered once in former days to draw cuts with me for the blank cartridge, on the chance of being able to kill me. I still think that would have been a mistake. I have come to feel differently about it since I saw the notice of your marriage. You are a more worthless being than I then thought you. I did at least believe you sincere. I find that you were not even that. For a man who could bluster so finely, you are a great disappointment. Why do you desert a true and beautiful woman to take up with——"

Waters finishes with a gesture of supreme disgust, facing Vanderveer with his steely eyes that never flinch from their steady look as he speaks.

"It is no business of yours," replies Vanderveer, hotly.

"I make it my business. You once pretended to love Miss Carrington."

"Pretended!"

"Nothing more, evidently. It was a pretense—or a self-deception, of course. Otherwise you would not now have deserted her for another."

Vanderveer's manner softens as he says, sadly:

"Alas! I have lost her. I do not know why you make it your affair—but I will grant for the moment that you may have some reasonable motive for your questions. If you wish me to defend my course I have no objections to doing so. Since when was it expected of a man that he should refrain from marrying on account of some former affection? Since when was such a marriage the proof that his former affection was insincere?"

"Since the world began, of course. Especially in your case, too. Her misfortune, that would have bound any man not a coward closer, has been to you only the signal for deserting her."

"What are you talking about? You of all men should know that I stood by her to the end. Why are you interested in her, pray?"

"That I will not tell you. You stood by her? That is curious. And you are to be married to-morrow. Your steadfastness has curious limits. As she was accused of being a criminal you could not afford to make your attachments unconditional. True, you made a great show of them at Graystone—but they would not wear in fair weather, after all. You are going to marry another."

"And why not? The world does not generally demand—honor does not necessarily demand—that I should remain, even the year that is decently demanded of a widower, heart free. That course could not recall her to life from the silence of the ocean, Mr. Waters."

"What? Speak that again. Harris Vanderveer, are you a rascal or a dupe? Is it true, then, that you have heard nothing—that you do not know that—— Oh!"

He stares at Vanderveer, his thoughts flashing about for the explanation, and then, bringing his hand softly down on Vanderveer's, he says, in a low, magnetic, mellow tone that thrills like music:

"Forgive me, Vanderveer. I have wronged you. You did not know that—she lives!"

Vanderveer stares into Waters's eyes, and begins to tremble in every limb. Waters strokes his hand a little, waiting for him to sense the words.

"My God!" Vanderveer sobs at last, catching his breath like a man recovering from a swoon. "And I am to be married to-morrow. Speak! Tell me you are not jesting—or plotting. Who are you, John Waters?"

"A man who suffers," says Waters, turning away his head.

"Does Brauna live? Tell me all."

"You should know. She wrote you. Where is the letter?"

"Why say that? I have no word. Prove what you say. Why do you torture me? If she lives why has she not—— Was there a letter, then?"

"Yes; and she lives, as I have said. She wrote long ago. I have heard that you received that letter. Your confidential clerk—Mr. Smith—told me so."

"Incredible! You are romancing, Mr. Waters. But where is she? Tell me what you know. How did she, then, escape death in the sea?"

"That I do not know. I have not seen her and do not know where they are hiding. I assumed that you knew and that you nevertheless were about to marry another. If I wronged you, Mr. Vanderveer, I apologize. There has been villainy, then. What became of the letter?"

"Wait. Do you know, then, only that which my clerk told you? That shall be looked into. But if he told you I had a letter from Brauna—why did he tell you that, now? He may have made some mistake. But if that is all you know——"

"It is not. I know a man who has seen and talked with Alvaroff and his daughter. They live, and are in hiding still from their enemies. More than that, I was aware some time before I learned what I did from this man Smith that their enemies knew that they lived and were planning to recapture them. If you did not get the letter, then either your clerk had a reason for lying to me, or he has failed to give you the letter. Who, now, is Mr. James Smith?"

"He comes recommended. His references are of the best. He could have no motive for doing what you charge him with."

"None known to you. Vanderveer, there's a loose place somewhere. But one thing is fact without doubt. The fugitives live."

"Why do you tell me this, pray? Why are you not engaged, then, in hunting them down, as you did before?"

"Bah! Are you then so simple as not to be able to see an inch before your nose? Was I to put myself at the mercy of everybody? It is time now that I confided in you, if you are worthy of it. Tell me, then, first, on what day you will marry Blanche Evans-ton."

"At the end of a million millenniums beyond the conclusion of eternity—if my darling lives."

He rises to his feet, and his fine eyes glitter like light, till Waters feels a qualm of heartsickness at what he has done. Here he is, driving stings into his own heart in behalf of the man whom he had intended merely to accuse and perhaps smite in the face when he came in here. But he is glad in the midst of the pain that Vanderveer has not proved the coward he thought him. Waters gives a little sigh, and then says, quietly:

"I am glad to hear you speak like that, Mr. Vanderveer. It is like the man who once stood by her against the world and all danger. That deserves a return from me, and I will honor it. Tell me what you will do?"

"Break off without a regret. There will be no wedding."

"There may be a better way. Vanderveer, I have a plan by which we may save her and end this danger. But first I want to find them. You will help me. I have a clue, gained to-day, that will possibly lead to something. But it has astonished me, and I am not certain yet what it means.

"By heaven we will find them if they are on the earth. But why do you speak of saving them? You did not once work on that side."

"Excuse me—but you were not to blame for being a little stupid about me in that affair at Graystone. I acted for the best. Recall that matter a little in your

mind, if you please. Did it ever strike you as singular that when the prisoners were put into that room no search of the room was made—for weapons, let us say—or for means of escape. Did I not know the resources of Alvaroff? Do you think me such an ass as to make that sort of provision which I did make against the escape of prisoners who were so important to my superiors as they? Do you not think I could read a man like Godby? Vanderveer, if Godby had not done just what I expected him to do, I had a dozen good ways of letting them slip loose. I made that arrest for their sakes. Suppose I had left it to a fool like Godby?"

Waters smiles, and looks calmly at Vanderveer. He is either a most consummate actor or a most skillful and powerful friend. Vanderveer stares at him, and when he can recover his wits after this astonishing revelation, he says, inquiringly:

"But she was deceived, then. She did not know. If you were a friend why did you not make some sign?"

"When—if ever—you know the men with whom I have associated for my own reasons, you will not ask. To-night I am risking something by opening the truth to you. If you betray me my life will be likely to pay for it. But that matters very little after I have served her. You therefore are to treat me as an enemy at all times when you see me in my own proper person. I am in disguise because I am watched. I have learned that I am suspected with having allowed my own ideas to interfere with certain commissions intrusted to me. Never mind that, Mr. Vanderveer, I hope not to die, and I hope not to be discovered, until the woman you love is saved. But once for all, I am her friend—and I think together we can accomplish that end. But begin by trusting me utterly."

Vanderveer looks into the calm, steady blue eyes. He remembers how this man has nobly refused his challenge. In spite of himself, when he thought him an enemy, Vanderveer has found it hard to believe. Now, as he looks in Waters's face, he yields to the magnetism of those eyes, and reaches across the table with his hand. Their hands meet, and Waters says, in a low tone:

"You will find her, Vanderveer—you will be happy. I congratulate you on winning the best woman in the world. I only hope she has not heard of your intended marriage. But now to business. Henceforth we work together. Let me tell you what I found to-day."

Waters takes out from his pocket a crumpled *Evening Sun*, and, pointing to a paragraph, Vanderveer reads Benonski's advertisement slowly, not sensing it in the least.

"What is the meaning of that, Mr. Waters?"

"Do you not remember that name—Ferrand Merki?"

"Certainly. But he has been dead seven years."

"True! That is the circumstance that renders this advertisement so mysterious. But I believe it refers to the fugitives. It was written by one of their enemies. The last clause: 'There is nothing without Liberty,' is familiar. Alvaroff was at one time a member of the Moscow League. That motto is one of the League formulas. If it means anything, it means that some one has discovered where they are hiding, and will possibly speculate on the information. But the strange part of it is that the name of Ferrand Merki has been used. I take that to be some signal agreed upon, to be used as a means of identification of the advertiser."

"You astonish me. It does indeed seem to refer to them—to some parties, at all events, who are in hiding."

"Yes. If the person for whom it is intended sees it, he will at once answer it in a cipher. I shall be able to read that cipher. Then we may make progress. Meanwhile I have a proposal to make. As I am suspected of having let them slip before, I propose to arrest them again if we can find them."

"Arrest them again?"

"Yes; and bring them to trial, too. Listen to my plan."

Vanderveer sits for an hour, while John Waters explains his daring scheme for saving the woman whom they both love. He goes home that night with a soul filled with admiration for John Waters and love for his hunted darling.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNWELCOME TELEGRAM.

It is the morning of Blanche's wedding day.

Her wedding day!

Who shall ever tell, of this serene creature rising early to prepare, that she has had other wedding days too?

But this is the first heart and soul day for her. Before the sun is at the zenith on this golden day of sunshine and joy she will make her past to disappear and a new world shall begin. It is so good to be able to undo history!

The sentiment of the ages pronounced an impossible dream she will now accomplish. The things that have been shall now be as if they had not. Dodo of the Rue Laval she once was. She shall now say to herself with the evening lamp lighting that Dodo never was. The black dreams of her memory will fade with the hateful face of François for ever away in the dawning rose light of a good man's love, and she will be re-created. Virtue shall sit at her thresh-old and sin shall flee away.

How we all dream that dream! To begin again—under better circumstances—to live another life—to know no shadowed past—yes, it is a vision of supernatural things, but oh! so difficult to accomplish.

But if any one can do this can not Blanche? She has built up such an impenetrable web of lies over the past. She has made her better self a reality in the eyes of all the world. She has left no trace of the gigantic lie to betray her. This remarkable woman with the brain of a diplomat and the art of a finished actress has left nothing undone. She knows in advance the sudden fate that before the day is gone will overtake François d'Avigne. She has Pierre Goidbeau drilled to his part. The track on which her new fortune will proceed is laid far out into the future. Nothing can prevent. Like a wise general, moreover, she has even provided for possible failure or delay. Not a blow will be struck until the wedding has been ac-

complished. If even then anything prevents the destruction of d'Avigne, she will not fear him. Even he will not be able, she believes, to ruin her, so skillful has been her work.

And now this doll-faced, lovely, sensuous creature, with unalloyed exultation in her heart, begins the fateful day.

God will not have it so. Blanche shall not bury the past. If she succeeds to-day, like every success, that will leave her still the creature of her fate, and being destined by the inexorable eternities out of which she comes, and into which she again must go, to live once and go her predestined path and no other, her success will not change the decrees which the stars write for every soul born into the world.

The beginning of her undoing comes with her breakfast. It brings her a shock that makes her tremble. There is a telegram among a half dozen messages of congratulation on her plate, which she opens first, supposing, with a smile on her face, that it is only another congratulation from a distance. She reads:

“Mr. Vanderveer smitten with a heart shock at midnight. Is very low. The physician gives little hope.”

The telegram is signed by his sister, with whom he lives. Blanche, reading it, grows pale as death. She knows in the first instant that this means delay—perhaps failure and ruin. “A heart shock.” What did that mean?

The whole situation rushes upon her in a dozen flashes of thought. To her credit, amid the forebodings as to the future of her plans, is a sudden pang for Vanderveer, for she loves him.

But Blanche has nerves of steel.

She rises from the table hastily, and informs the person who poses as her aunt that the telegram has announced Vanderveer's sudden illness. Then she orders a carriage and drives to Goidbeau's lodgings.

“We are delayed. Vanderveer is ill. The wedding

will not occur to-day," she announces, when Goidbeau appears.

"Ill? You are tricking me. He was well as I yesterday."

Blanche shows him the telegram.

"My head for it he has seen Benonski. It is all day with our plans then."

"Benonski is in Jersey, is he not?"

"Not so. He telegraphed after he left my office that he would not go. I have just got the word from Riggs. I should have been to see you in thirty minutes. I do not believe Vanderveer is sick."

Blanche is now thoroughly startled. She sees her fabric crumbling. Goidbeau may be right. But she does not abandon hope nor accept his opinion.

"You are stupid, Goidbeau. If Vanderveer has seen Benonski he would simply come over and do one of two things—go on with the wedding as a matter of honor—even if he prefers her, or call me names and break off like a man. He isn't the kind to sneak out on a pretense of sickness. I am going there immediately. Of course, my place is now by his side. Meanwhile we will attend to it that he neither sees nor hears from Benonski. Keep still and make no move until I give you the word. It is only a little delay, believe me."

Nevertheless her soul is flaming with apprehension as she drives off to the house of her bridegroom-elect, who might now never be a bridegroom at the altar with her.

At the door she is met by a servant with a grave face, who attends her into the parlors.

"Mr. Vanderveer can see no one, Miss Evanston, not even you. His life depends on it. The doctor is here now. He has been here nearly all night. He will see you in a few moments."

Blanche breathes freely again, the reaction from her fears being so great she almost swoons. The servant attributes this pallor to the shock his words have given, and reasons that she naturally would feel like this since she is Vanderveer's fiancée, and this was to have been their wedding day.

He gives her a little wine and retires. Blanche thinks the danger over. He must be genuinely sick. He has not merely heard something to lead him to delay, and excused himself on the plea of illness.

Presently a gentleman appears whom she recognizes as a physician whom she has met before. He recognizes her and bows gravely.

"Miss Evanston, I regret to say to you that Vanderveer has had a severe affection of the heart. You would better prepare yourself for whatever may ensue," says Doctor Brill, seriously. "There is a slight chance for him to recover if he follows the plan laid out for him. But I have forbidden any one to see him. I sympathize with you, my dear Miss Evanston. Be sure your friends will all extend their sympathies. I will tell you that foreseeing your possible embarrassment, I took pains to give to the press by special messenger during the night a statement of his condition. It is in the morning *Tribune* and the *Herald*. This will save you some embarrassment in answering possible questions."

He takes from his pocket a *Tribune* and shows her the item:

"We regret to learn that Mr. Harris Vanderveer, whose wedding was announced for to-day at noon, was seized last evening with a dangerous heart trouble, and his life is despaired of. The wedding is of course postponed."

Blanche, in spite of this evidence of Vanderveer's desperate condition, is greatly relieved. He might die—then her plans would be ended, true—but she preferred this by far to the possibility of seeing him again in the arms of her rival, as she had feared he might be if Goidbeau's suspicions had proved true.

She drives back home after some tears and genuine grief for Vanderveer, having the promise that she should receive messages at least twice a day from the sick bed. She goes away reviving her plans, and praying that Vanderveer may not die.

As she has been gone two hours and the morning

is now well advanced, she is not surprised to find D'Avigne waiting to see her.

"*Pardieu, ma chère*, I wish you a very good morning. How is this? Pale! It won't do at all. You should be rosy as the sun this morning. I salute you."

He kisses her hand in a kind of light and mocking obsequiousness. Blanche, who has expected to see him, is prepared for him. He will hear the news. She does not hope to conceal it. She tosses her head and says, seriously:

"I am glad you came. I feared you might desert me through sheer jealousy. But your chances have improved. Vanderveer is sick!"

"What do you mean?"

"Likely to die. I have just been refused admission to his chamber."

He sees that she is in earnest, and at once comprehends the seriousness of the situation. He is very quick-witted, and understands Blanche's expressions.

"I believe you. That means—— *Sacre!* It is unfortunate. Is it nothing worse than sickness? My fortune seems to hitch. But tell me all."

"I received this at the breakfast table," showing him the telegram.

He reads it with a little scowl.

"And it is genuine—there is no danger in it farther?"

"I saw Doctor Brill. He declares that Vanderveer has but a slight chance to escape death."

"So bad? No wonder you are pale. On the wedding day, too! But it might be worse. If he dies we can go elsewhere. If he doesn't we can continue."

"If we do not meet with more snags. I have not told you about Benonski. You do not know him. He was a servant and confidential man of the Alvar-offs. One of those absurd fellows who are faithful for nothing."

"I don't believe in them. Every man has his conditions. What of this Benonski? You have something important."

He guesses this because he, too, like Goidbeau, has

learned to anticipate something of moment whenever Blanche begins to take on that dreamy, false tone.

"Important? What is important, François? Nothing whatever. Everything is trivial. We are to die—that will be the least important thing of all. This Benonski has been to see Pierre. He wrote first saying he had something important for Vanderveer. Goidbeau is sharp—when he is not dull. I adore Pierre. He loved me before you did, don't forget. Well—about Benonski. Pierre was sharp enough to set a trap. We both believed that he could have but one thing about which he could wish to see Vanderveer. He has learned that Brauna Alvaroff is living, and wished to tell about it. That would not have suited me, would it, *mon cher*?"

"The devil! Why did you not tell me? He is still at large then, no doubt. How can we know that this does not explain Vanderveer's sickness?"

"Soft, my love. It does not explain anything. Benonski doubtless has not yet seen Vanderveer. It is doubtful if he will try. But there was just a little danger of it for a time—so Pierre and I decided. But let us hope that is past. But you did not hear about our trap."

"The trap! You set a trap and caught——"

"Nothing at all."

"Failed, do you mean?"

"Yes. But Pierre was better than a trap after all. Let me tell you. We sent him out into Jersey on a wild goose chase. Pierre arranged with a couple of good fellows of his acquaintance to detain him there until after the wedding. He went to the wrong place—missed them—came back and agreed with Pierre on a new start. This morning Pierre hears that he sent a telegram instead that he would not go. What does that mean?"

"Pest! That he has discovered something. The thing was bungled. I am more inclined to think that this is the cause of Vanderveer's sickness. We must look out, Dodo."

She smiles and gives a little gesture of disdain.

"If you are afraid, say so. I did not know what a

chicken you really are. But reserve your sentiments. There is more to it."

"Tell it then."

François conceals his annoyance under a smile. He is by no means pleased by this evidence that Pierre and Blanche have been conducting an important matter without taking him into their confidence.

"Pierre filled this Russian full of lies. That is his reason for not going to Jersey. I guess that he waited to tell his lies to the friends before he started. I also guess that when this saint who murdered her husband——"

"Bah! You are talking nonsense. You do not believe that, of course," interrupts François.

She gives a gesture of disgust and says, softly:

"Of course. Isn't she hiding? Why does she hide if she isn't guilty? You are too credulous. Pierre doesn't believe it either. I do, of course. But don't interrupt. I'll never get to my point. I am telling you what I guess. Benonski told Pierre's lies to the saint. One of them is that he got her letter and had decided that she was not a very nice person to marry. Pierre didn't tell that as news, but merely as if everybody knew it. It was nicely done, so Pierre himself declares. The saint is sharp enough to be proud. She tells Benonski that he needn't go to Jersey to follow a man who has basely deserted her. So he telegraphs, and they retire. That will settle the matter for some time. He will make no more effort to see Vanderveer, and Vanderveer, being sick, will learn nothing. She is the only one interested in telling him, and she will never do it. So you need not be frightened, Monsieur d'Avigne," she sneers, gleaming on him with her soft, dovelike eyes, as she leans back in her easy chair like the beautiful animal that she is, her whole attitude betraying the consciousness that she feels herself still to be mistress of the situation.

"Superb! If what you tell is the truth, you have managed like a diplomat. It is cursed unfortunate that he is taken sick. But we seem to be able to wait. But it is better not to leave any loopholes. There ought to be a way to verify this account of Vanderveer's sickness. Think, Dodo, dear."

"It is folly. The physician would not dare to—there is no motive whatever for deceit. But if you wish really to be more certain, I will see Pierre. He has a girl—a French housemaid—in Vanderveer's house. We took that precaution some time since. She shall find out, certainly. It will do no harm."

"Set her at work then," says François.

CHAPTER XX.

"WHY HAVE YOU BETRAYED US?"

Count St. Mart Golfi, sitting once more alone, is again studying the book of records of the Moscow League, when he is interrupted by a message from the little telegraph bell at his hand.

His brows cloud darker, as he says to himself:

"Ah! He will come, then. He is not shrewd enough. I believed he had the alarm and had made himself safe beyond my reach. A brave and skillful man, but a traitor—perhaps—perhaps," then signals, "Admit the person who wishes to enter."

In a few seconds John Waters enters, looks all around with a sharp glitter of his watchful eyes. Golfi wonders if he has any warning that he may be walking into the jaws of the tiger.

"Number 66! Sit down. I have sent for you."

"Yes. I have come. Command me."

"Good! I will. Waters, I command you to die."

"It is a slight thing," says Waters, with a smile. He knows from the manner and the tone, however, that Golfi is not jesting.

"True! Death was robbed of its terrors when we became patriots. You have played us false. Deny it and I will show you the records."

"Records are mostly fictions. I came for the purpose of showing that. Besides, when I die, it will be in a good cause and not as a traitor. I am not ready yet to obey even so unimportant an order as that. Why am I suspected?"

"You have plotted. You have allowed our enemies to escape death."

"Prove it. Bring me the man who affirms it."

"I myself am the man. More suspects have escaped from you than from all the other arrests and seizures in the history of this League."

"You ought to know whether I am to blame. Who let these people slip? Was it not in every case men who were trusted and whom I used because I must? When did I ever select my own subordinates?"

"I have considered that. Invariably you have put some weak fellow on guard—or you have managed to have your orders miscarry. Your cases are too clear. I advise you to obey my order. If you do not, the earth will not be large enough to hide you from the justice of the patriots of Moscow."

"It is trivial—as I have said. I am complimented that you give me the choice accorded only to brave men. Cowards are not that way dealt with. How soon do you demand that your order be executed, Count Golfi?"

"I give you twenty-four hours."

"You are too generous. I should not be willing to give you six if we were to exchange places. It is time sufficient for a man like me to do a great deal of mischief."

"That may be a threat. I will therefore reduce it to six. After that I shall sign the red order and give it to fifty patriots. They will understand; it is an unusual case."

"I myself understand. The red order is *carte blanche* to fifty men to assassinate me on sight. Fear and honor will combine to spur them to the task. Very well. I can not undo the orders of Count St. Mart Golfi. But when I am dead, it will still vex you that Alvaroff, the traitor of the plot of 1874, still walks the earth. I am sure you would prefer that he should die, if choice were given you. Let us speak of him."

"So! You know this, do you? It is a pity as God lives to kill a man who knows as much as all the men who will destroy him combined. Waters, why have you betrayed us?"

"You count my denials as straw. When I think you yourself believe that I have betrayed the patriots

of this League I will begin to suspect it myself. I depend greatly on the judgment of Count St. Mart Golfi."

His cool disdain is admirable. He bows low, never changing his baffling smile, as he stands in his challenging defiance before the terrible Golfi.

"True! Your denials are those of a man to whom black would be white if he only resolved upon it. But you have ceased to deceive me. A man is not really too valuable to die when he becomes too dangerous to live. But you have not denied. You merely parry."

"I feel humiliated. I parry—and, stupid that I am, I do it so bunglingly you discern it at once. Let it be so. Would you believe me if I denied with some show of emphasis? Doubtless you would! Doubtless you feel certain that a man who might be suspected of being a traitor must not be suspected of being a liar. Admirable logic!"

Golfi laughs. He is almost disposed to recall the fatal order, under the conviction that in spite of the records he is mistaken in his judgment. But he is not at ease in Waters's presence. Powerful as he is himself, he has the uneasy consciousness that here is a man not a whit his inferior, to say the least.

"Since you do not see fit to deny, then why should not I conclude that you confess?" he goes on, pursuing his thought persistently.

"Because you might more easily imagine that I would deny. Let us leave the matter there. If my work is done in behalf of Russia and her oppressed ones there is little left that invites me to life. I think it likely your order will be timely and most agreeable. But I have a word for you first. Let us return to Alvaroff. You are aware that he lives."

"What of Alvaroff? It was you who permitted his escape."

"So. This, then, was the charge. Who made it?"

"Godby told of it."

"Who else was there?"

"You know; but it is here."

He turns to the record book and reads off the names.

"It is correct," assents Waters, coldly. "One of them is Martin, I recall. Call Martin and ask him how many men I ordered to be put in that room."

"I will."

He rings the bell. Baron de Lani appears in a moment, bowing.

"Go," says Golfi, imperiously, "and bring me Number 43—Alcaire Martin."

Waters remains coolly silent until Martin enters.

"Question him," says Waters, without a quaver.

Turning to Martin, Golfi demands, in stern voice:

"The prisoners escaped from the house—did they not?"

"True. That is well known."

"Who guarded them?"

"Godby inside—I outside. I have heard that Godby has been punished. I hope I am not accused also."

Martin seems to show trepidation, and edges away a little before the gaze of his chief, as if wishing himself anywhere else save here.

"Have no fear. What were the orders given you by Waters? Tell all you know."

"Mr Waters ordered Godby and two more to stay inside, and set me at the door. Godby dismissed the other two, and told us that he was entirely able to guard the prisoners himself."

"Why did you not report this to Waters?"

"Godby had been sent by Mercer Street, and I had been ordered to obey him. Mr. Waters came later with orders from the League. I felt it my duty to obey Godby, and not Waters."

"That will do, Martin. I will look into the matter further. Good day, sir."

Martin steals out, casting a sly glance at Waters, who appears not to notice him as he leaves the room.

"Martin has a good lesson," sneers the count. "He must have consulted. But I have decided to believe him until I decide to believe something else. Waters, I extend the time. I will notify you when it expires. Martin has given you a reprieve."

"That is also a trifle. But you may now be will-

ing to listen to that which I came here to say. Godby has reported to you I learn, that the traitor Alvaroff is living."

"Godby? You should know that he is in Russia. Godby has told nothing."

"What?" exclaims Waters, in apparent astonishment. "You must be mistaken. Godby is in New York. Now by the great Jupiter, Count Golfi, I have solved a problem! Heavens! Count, as I live I think I can tell you why Alvaroff was allowed to escape. Come! The thing is plain as day! It has puzzled me, and I do not frequently get baffled, as you may know. Count Golfi—the secret is Godby. He is in New York. This very day I guessed him out. Let me tell you the truth now. Godby, who let them get away before, has been rewarded. He did not go to Russia. You have heard that Alvaroff's daughter has a lover. Very well. Godby is in that man's employ. I have seen him. He is in disguise. For a long time I have been puzzling over his face. I had seen him somewhere, that I knew. I had heard the voice. To-day I hit the solution. I will tell you, whether you believe it or not, that I have made up my mind to undo the mischief Godby did that night, and to hunt these people down. I have an interest. My reputation has suffered. I will put into your hands again the traitor Alvaroff and his daughter, if you want her also."

Waters, studying carefully every word he is saying, seems to be suppressing his emotions, and keeping back some possible enthusiasm as he speaks. Golfi looks at him with interest. He can not find ground for believing that this remarkable man is merely acting. He sees no reason why he should lie where he is sure to be discovered. He is startled to hear him say that Godby did not go to Russia. It gives him some suspicions that his orders were thwarted by somebody. He could not tell why he has so much difficulty with this Alvaroff case.

"I believe that Alvaroff will be caught, Mr. Waters," he replies, not ready yet to take up Waters too confidently. "But that was certain as soon as we

got word that he still lives. He can not escape. But the Godby clue is valuable. There can be no objection to working it. Mr. Waters, I warn you that there will be no more opportunities for such slips as you seem to have been implicated in during your history—as these books show. Work if you like. If you capture this cursed traitor and his daughter, who is quite as important just now, it will do something to correct these records against you.”

“Why do you also hunt the traitor’s daughter. I find it harder to hunt down women, Count Golfi. But it might be easier if I knew there is a good reason. True, I have heard the case. She murdered Merki. But I am not intrested in that. Pardon me. Why are you?”

“It is a very easy way to strike deeper. I remember Siberia. I will sting the traitor to the brink of his grave. I remember Siberia.”

“I have memories, also, Count Golfi. But I strike my enemies, and not their innocent children. Merki was a doubtful Nihilist, was he not?”

“Perhaps. But I am not disposed to give an accounting to you, Mr. Waters. This is the way I have chosen to strike. I remember a hint. It was suggested to me that you might have been tenderhearted about the daughter. Your questions run the same way. On the whole you would better keep your hands off the case entirely. There might be something in it.”

“Ah, Count Golfi! I see it is not easy to evade the penetrating power of your keen mind. I did not think that my face and words would so betray me. I can not deny your charge. My heart was seized by the grip of a woman’s eyes, Count Golfi. I loved her. But that was one reason why I would rather have seen her dead than in the arms of another man. But all that is past. I went there to make sure about that arrest. I hoped, when she saw that she was in the toils, that she might even repent that she had disdained my offers. I proposed to her—and she laughed at me. She told me plainly that she preferred another man. Think you that such a man as I forget that

easily? She refused me. Very well. I may not like to persecute even after that—but you can judge for yourself whether I am capable of allowing her to escape into a rival's arms. Mr. Vanderveer challenged me. He challenged me twice. But I, in turn, could laugh at him. He had the satisfaction of seeing her escape, thanks to Godby. Now he has broken off with a woman whom he was about to marry. That means that he has heard that they still live. It is in the papers. So now if you, Count Golfi, think I am anxious to assist him—and her—because I once thought I loved her, you can reflect on the situation longer. It will not be my fault that she is arrested. I will stay by and let another do it.”

“On the contrary, if they are found you shall do it yourself. That will give me some clue to you, Mr. Waters. I give you positive orders. You shall have entire charge of the case. This is your opportunity to re-establish yourself, sir,” replies Golfi, smiling, as he writes out the order.

CHAPTER XXI.

“YOU HAVE BEEN DREAMING!”

“‘There is nothing without Liberty.’ Nearest bench to the Broadway entrance of the City Hall. Saturday on the stroke of 10 a.m. Siberia.”

Benonski translates the cipher as it appears in the *Herald* on Thursday. He knows it is an answer to his own personal, inserted the day before. He has not changed his mind about his identification of Ferrand Merki, but is satisfied that the being whom he saw at the Broadway corner is no other than the same man whom he once saw in his shroud in the coroner's place seven years gone by. He is also firm in the hope that this fortunate discovery will be the means of saving from further trials and pursuit by enemies the beautiful daughter of his master.

If there is more to it, and if Alvaroff is indeed the

object of Count Golfi's vengeance, as he has explained, still it will be much to remove the nearer and more imminent danger. A private revenge has less terror than a threat of prosecution for a public crime, and Alvaroff is a man. If his daughter is saved he will care very little what a Russian refugee may try to do.

Benonski, reasoning thus, has determined to verify, if possible, his brief recognition of Merki. He does not hope to do more by his advertisement. He hopes Merki by this means may be brought within his reach, and he sets cunningly about his plan. He reflects that if Merki is living and has not shown himself to those who know him, then he has some reason for hiding.

Benonski has not been astonished to remember that Merki showed no sign of recognition on meeting him face to face. He believes that he might with impunity go to Merki anywhere without the danger of being remembered.

Nevertheless, as the part of a greater prudence, he goes to a little costumer's in White Street, and secures a skillful disguise. He thought it best to take no chances. In this disguise, when Saturday comes, he boards a car and rides to the City Hall Square. In his impatience he is a half hour early, but keeping himself in control, he sits quietly down on the bench nearest the Broadway entrance to City Hall. It is a pleasant winter morning, and, taking a morning paper from his pocket, he begins reading. He had hardly glanced at the paper when a man having the appearance of a well-to-do country merchant of advanced years comes along from the direction of the Postoffice, and inquires the way to the Brooklyn Ferry. Benonski starts. He looks at the stranger keenly for a moment, but there was no sign in him of any resemblance to anybody whom Benonski had ever seen before, so, giving the required direction, he turns once more to his newspaper.

"Ah, Mr. Benonski. You disguise yourself well," says the stranger, coolly.

The Russian catches his breath, stares at the

stranger in amazement and humiliation. He is discovered the very first instant.

"I repeat it—you have done it very well. But the voice—surely you do not manage that. No one can manage the voice perfectly. It has betrayed many a man. 'There is nothing without Liberty'—therefore I wish to know, on the honor of a brother, why you have advertised."

"Who, then, are you?" asks Benonski, still staring at the old man. "If you were the devil himself you could not guess more to the point."

"I have come in answer to your advertisement. Did you not expect me?"

"No. The man whom I expected—but I will say nothing. Who are you and who sent you?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Benonski—I am not quite ready to tell you. But first I am Alvaroff's friend. I have come here to capture you and seal up your lips. That is, now I have discovered that it is you who have advertised, that will be my plan. You may trust me. Now, as you love Dimitri Alvaroff—but perhaps you do not love him. I once thought so. If so, why do you now plot to betray him?"

This question is the best one for the purpose that could have been asked. It rouses Benonski, and stings him, too. Whenever his loyalty to the only persons on earth whom he loves is questioned, then it is time to defend himself.

"Be careful. No man shall accuse me of that, I say. It is a lie. If you don't like being called a liar, old man, you can go on."

Benonski's nostrils dilate in his indignation, and he stands up as if to defy all the world on his assertion.

The stranger laughs.

"That is the best thing I could have heard you say, Mr. Benonski. It leaves you then to explain why you advertise to deliver them up to their enemies."

"I am not obliged to explain anything to you, am I?" he jeers.

"Yes. Obligated by your love for them. You know where they are. They escaped—escaped twice. I think I can trust you, Mr. Benonski. I did not for a

moment believe that you were plotting to betray them. But I must know why you have inserted that advertisement."

The old man holds out the *Herald* and points to Benonski's advertisement.

"Must! Do you think, then, that I am to unfold to you anything whatever? Did you come from Ferrand Merki? He is the man for whom I am advertising. But he would never have called my name as you have. I will tell you nothing."

"Ferrand Merki, as you well know, perished by the hand of an assassin more than seven years ago. You are throwing dust now. Who is the person for whom you have advertised under that name. Is it Mr. Vanderveer?"

"Whoever you are," says Benonski, after a long pause to think, "you evidently know about a good many things. Vanderveer is a coward, a sneak, and a villain."

There is a savage ring in the Russian's voice that seems to amuse and please the stranger. He laughs softly, and replies:

"It may interest you to learn that Mr. Vanderveer is reported by his physicians to be at death's door."

"Let him die, then," says Benonski, brutally. "He isn't fit to live."

"You don't like him, I see. Why are you advertising for him, then?"

"Pest! It is no affair of yours. I advertised for a better man. If he sent you here, much good may it do."

"No one at all sent me. I came on my own account. Now it will perhaps happen that the man for whom you have advertised will also come along at any moment. If he should, I shall then learn who it is without asking. How will you prevent that, Mr. Benonski?"

"Who has said that I advertised for any one? Who cares whether you stay or go? But if you are so interested, why should you not make known to me your identity, and tell me what you are here for?"

"I will. I have been ordered by Count St. Mart

Golfi to find and arrest the traitor Alvaroff, who betrayed the patriots of 1874 at the Bouski Plaza into the hands of the Czar's officers and troops. I have accepted that commission, and I, having unexpectedly found you, Mr. Benonski, desire you to point out their hiding place, and assist me in bringing them to the desired punishment."

No one could portray the astonishment of Benonski at hearing these most startling and audacious announcements. He sits and stares stupidly at the old man as if dazed.

"And I prophesy, Mr. Benonski," goes on the stranger, "that you will most gladly lend your aid. You will do it in the interests of justice and brotherhood."

Benonski, slowly recovering his wits, says, slowly, but impressively:

"If you speak seriously—then you have a little task that is more perilous than any you have ever undertaken. I myself will see to it that you, whoever you may be, shall be the first to regret having undertaken that task. My life is worth very little, but it goes for them. But you are speaking in riddles. If this is your purpose, you do ill to reveal it to me."

"Not if I enlist your help."

"What do you mean?"

"If I offered you money—enough to make you rich now——"

"Stop! Another word and I will choke you black in the face, old as you are," cries the Russian, springing to a threatening attitude.

Again the stranger laughs—a cool, tantalizing laugh.

"Sit down, Mr. Benonski. We are wasting time. Well—not altogether, perhaps. I was willing to try you a little, notwithstanding my former confidence in you. But you can not choke me—and on the whole you would not if you could. What I have told you, however, is strictly true—and without money and without price, you, Mr. Benonski, will help me, as I have said. You need not protest nor deny just now. Action is the thing needed. Where are they hiding? If you love them, tell me at once. Wait! Before I ex-

pect you to tell me that, let me show you what reason I have for asking the questions. In the first place, let me tell you that Mr. Vanderveer, whose physicians do not let him see any one, has had a hand in planning the arrest of Alvaroff's daughter. What do you say to that?"

"I say it is probably a lie. I myself have never believed him as base as that. Why do you seek to deceive me with such stuff?"

"I do not deceive. It is true. He and I together have arranged, if we can find them, to arrest them—and save them."

"Save them! Golfi save them?"

"No! Save them from Golfi—and all others. It is necessary to the success of my plans and to their safety and escape that I, and not any other, make this arrest. I will tell you how in five minutes. Sit down here, and keep a watch for the man for whom you advertised, and listen while I talk."

The stranger sits down on the bench as an example, and Benonski, suspicious but curious, and beginning to feel a burning interest in this remarkable stranger, sits down also.

"You will see very soon how fortunate it is that I answered this advertisement and found you. It was but a clue—it has developed far better than I hoped. Benonski, here is a plan for saving your master and mistress."

The stranger's voice is lowered and for about ten minutes he pours into the Russian's ear his plan. Benonski sits entranced. He feels not only the unerring logic of the plot, but far more the overmastering magnetism of the stranger. He can not doubt that this man is familiar with all the history of Alvaroff and Brauna.

"This," says the old man, as he concludes his outline, "is the road to success. They have friends. Vanderveer has heard. He has abandoned his marriage. He has accepted this method of helping them. It remains for you to do the same."

"And who are you? Why do you thus propose to befriend them? It will be a dreadful ordeal. We must warn her."

"Not as you love your life. Above all things, no. She is not to know—Alvaroff is not to know. Think you either of them would consent? Not for a moment. They would spurn the thought."

"It might kill her. She is sensitive."

"No. She shall live. If it should be necessary to her life, I myself will tell her what we must."

"You. Who, then, are you?"

"A friend. It is I who saved them before—though with the rest of you I believed we had failed, and that the sea had swallowed them. It was I who caused that man Waters to put only one rascal on guard whom I knew could be bribed. Believe me, they are not without friends. Now will you take me to them?"

"I have but your word. The last word is indeed the strongest. I thought then, and have believed ever since, that there was something working there at Graystone which did not appear. I have even believed that this Waters, who seems to be a very devil at times, might be a friend in secret."

"No, no; don't believe that! He is the most daring and hateful man among their enemies. He was suspected on account of their escape, and will now move heaven and earth to compass their seizure. That leads me to say that if by any chance whatever he forestalls me, and succeeds in making this arrest himself—as he certainly will if he can, you are not to fear. Whoever makes it, the plan will work just the same."

"Yes. If I adopt it. But you have yet to show me that it is not all a scheme for betraying them."

"In God's name, why should I attempt that? When I recognized you here, why should not I have passed on? I had only to follow you to their nest. If I were an enemy do you think I would thus put my schemes and intentions into the hands of a man known to be their best friend? Look the case over, and see if it is not enough to convince you that I am working for and not against them."

The Russian thinks very hard, then replies:

"I accept your statement. I will adopt the plan. I do it, not because it pleases me, but because, somehow, I have a feeling it is a good plan, and ought

to succeed. I shall not be powerless to help them, nor to punish their enemies, if worst comes to worst. I know a way—I know a way—even if you are an enemy. It will not be a good thing for you if you betray them—mark that—and it will not be a fateful thing for them—mark that also.”

The stranger looks at him with a new interest.

“You mean that you are able to save them—if it is necessary?”

“I mean—nothing. But I accept you as a friend. Why will you not now inform me what and who you are?”

“I will—a little. I am a member of the Moscow League, as you know from the signals I have made since I talked here. I am also a man who has a good and sufficient reason to keep a sharp watch on the acts and even the thoughts of that man Waters. He and I have a little score to settle. He does not know that I hate him. I am heading him off constantly. I know all his plots in this matter, and consequently I shall be able if I undertake it, to defeat them. I have found out what his motives are, too. Alvaroff’s daughter rejected him. That is the animus of all his wretched hatred of them. If I am as interested in defeating him as I am in saving them, I have a double motive—do you not see that? As to my name—what boots that? A man who must live double—befriend his friends and at the same time be in the secrets of their enemies, does well not to be too free with his name. If you desire to speak of me to any one, call me Mr. Brown.”

“I knew before the secret of Waters’s enmity. Alvaroff has enlightened me. It relieves my mind to know that he, of all others, is to be guarded against.”

“And now will you be so good, Mr. Benonski, as to enlighten me about the advertisement? Does it mean that Alvaroff wishes to communicate with friends?”

“Alvaroff knows nothing about that matter.”

“Ah! You work without his confidence, Mr. Benonski?”

“Perhaps. But there was no harm in it.”

“Everything is harm that might threaten to betray their hiding-place. Tell me frankly what it means.”

In spite of all his caution, Benonski has slowly yielded to the magnetism of this stranger. His voice when he speaks is like a soft flute, and yet as strong as a voice of command. The piercing eyes entrance yet master him. He can not explain the singular fascination that has thrown over him a spell so potent that under it he has resolved to take this man into confidence and reveal to him the hiding-place of his loved ones, and enter upon the scheme proposed for their escape. And when now the old man smiles with such a winning expression, and yet with such power in his look, Benonski replies to him, impulsively:

"I advertised for Ferrand Merki. You see that in the wording, do you not?"

"You play blindman's buff with me, Mr. Benonski. Merki can not answer. Or perhaps you have been consulting the mediums. By the rights of a sound theology taught by the Greek Church, Merki is doubtless in hell."

"I thought so, too. Mr. Brown, did you ever hear of a man who is in hell taking a walk on Broadway at ten o'clock in the forenoon?"

"On my word I never did. It is not incredible that some who should be there walk Broadway almost any fine forenoon."

Mr. Brown laughs softly and waits for more.

"But not men who have been dead for more than seven years—think you?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"That I saw Ferrand Merki walk there three days since—as God hears me."

"You have been dreaming," says Mr. Brown.

CHAPTER XXII.

"DID YOU COME IN ANSWER TO THIS?"

When the letters of Valond suddenly stopped, and nothing could be heard of him by mail or wire, Merki feared that something had slipped, and sent Ruoff and another subordinate to investigate. They brought

back the report that Valond had disappeared, that his boat had been found on the other side of the Sound adrift, that the fugitives had not been seen since. The fisherman where they had found shelter professed to know nothing, save that his guests had gone back to New York. He could not even furnish their address. He was dumb and cunning. The prisoners had undoubtedly escaped—through what blundering of Valond or through what misfortune, Merki could not tell.

But as Valond did not turn up, he was obliged to go to Golfi with the news. He was encouraged by Golfi, who declared that sooner or later they would undoubtedly be discovered. To spur on the search, Golfi privately named to the most trustworthy of his men a liberal reward for their discovery. Merki, who had no purpose in the world except to keep shady and await the results of his search, retired to obscure lodgings on the east side, and showed himself only for a short walk now and then. He did not fear to be recognized, as he knew of no one who would be likely to identify him.

He was properly astonished, then, when he saw in the morning paper the advertisement which Benonski had inserted. He at once, on thinking a little, attributed it to Valond. He believed that the spy had turned up safely, and was perhaps afraid to come back to him without first feeling the way. Very likely Valond has some clue, and will aid him to find the fugitives.

Accordingly he answered the advertisement.

On this Saturday, according to his appointment, not thinking it important even to disguise himself, so certain is he that he will find no one more dangerous than Valond, he repairs to the vicinity of City Hall Square to keep the appointment. Unlike Benonski he is not early—in fact, he is about ten minutes late.

Benonski is still in the midst of his vehement assertions relating to the stranger, how he had seen the man who had been thought dead, when Merki himself appears, crossing the park straight toward them.

“Look! Look now! He is coming at this instant. He has seen the advertisement.”

Mr. Brown looks and catches his breath sharply.

"Ah!" he says, in a low tone. "There is something strange here. If that is not Ferrand Merki, then it is a miracle we look upon. Do not stare—do not look at him, Mr. Benonski. This may be more important than I have believed. But allow me to talk to him. It is most astonishing."

Merki by this time is very near. He inspects the figures on the bench to determine whether either of them might not be Valond in some disguise. But he decides at once that they are both much larger men than Valond. They are only there by chance, he thinks. He will wait a little. He sits down on a bench near at hand, and looks all around, hoping to see Valond somewhere.

"Excuse me," says Mr. Brown, rising, and approaching Merki. "But did you come in answer to this?"

He points to the paper with the advertisement.

"Yes. And who, pray, are you? Did Valond send you?"

"Valond is not here, though," says Mr. Brown, vaguely, feeling his way along. "But if you would like to see him, perhaps I could bring it about."

Mr. Brown has guessed from the single question of Merki several things. He has guessed that Valond, whoever he may be, would not have been expected here unless Merki thought him the advertiser. He also guesses that Valond may be some one who would be supposed to know something about the fugitives.

"If you represent him, then," says Merki, feeling sure that this is Valond's work, "perhaps you will tell me why he is not here himself. He knows that I would not harm him—especially if he has news."

"Perhaps you would give your assurances of that," says Mr. Brown, seeing yet more light on the situation. "Valond has no relish for being punished."

He shoots this last arrow at a venture, not knowing how accurately he has hit the mark. But he is gratified to hear Merki reply:

"The idiot! Why should I punish him? If he atones for letting Alvaroff slip by telling me where he is, that makes it far more than even."

"I know all that story," says Mr. Brown, boastingly. "Valond did not let them slip. At least, he is not confessing to anything. But perhaps he can tell where they are, all the same. But he thinks it just as safe to send me on ahead to find out how you are feeling toward him. He will appear when he thinks it entirely safe. Why do you say he let the fugitives slip?"

"He did let them slip, of course. Alvaroff outwitted him some way, I suppose. I was uncertain whether he was hiding through fear, or whether he had been set upon and finished by that desperate traitor. To tell the truth I have been glad ever since seeing this advertisement, for I know he is still alive. Valond is a valuable fellow, and I should be sorry to lose him. He has confided in you, I see. Perhaps you are worthy of that. What is your name?"

"There is nothing without Liberty," says Mr. Brown, cunningly. "I can give you as many signals as you give me. I also read the cipher very well."

"I assumed as much. Valond would hardly trust a man who could not. Where is Valond?"

"Where I can produce him when he feels like showing himself. After the traitor and his daughter are surrendered by his information, then he will think that you have less cause to be angry and will walk in on you as large as ever."

"What about the boat? Was that his work—or did he really get into some scrape? It was found away over in Connecticut. Ruoff could get no further clue of Valond. I had a slight idea he might have been drowned."

"Valond was not born to be drowned. He is more likely to be hanged. But he lost all his money."

"Oh, that is the game, then, is it? He wants to bargain with me. How much does the rascal demand for his information?"

Mr. Brown puts on a cunning look, and replies, slowly:

"Oh, no! Valond would not do that. But if you were disposed to lend him—say a hundred dollars to buy him some clothes—he spoiled a good suit, you see—perhaps it would make him work quicker and

feel more cheerful. He says that you will make enough out of the matter not to miss it."

"The greedy rascal. He will extort, will he? Very well. When I know the place where I can put my hand on Alvaroff and his daughter, he shall have the hundred—and a new suit besides."

"And you will forget that Alvaroff outwitted him?"

"As true as I live, I will never hear of it. Why should I? You can tell him that, on the word of a man who never promised Valond anything he did not get—not even a drubbing."

The cat laughs, showing his fang-like teeth. He is pleased beyond measure at thus hearing of Valond's escape, and with the prospect of finding his prey.

"But if you were to send Valond his money now by me! Well, he would think your sincerity entirely beyond question. In that case, I think I could promise that you should see him in this very place, if you come with several good men on Monday about noon. He would take you directly to the place where they are."

Merki looks sharply at Mr. Brown, but he can not see how there can be any error in this matter. Surely no one who had not come from Valond could have shown himself so familiar with the matter which Valand has so badly bungled.

Taking some bills from his pocket, he counts out fifty dollars.

"Give Valond this now, and tell him for me that he shall have the remainder when he shows himself on Monday. Will you come with him?"

"Be sure I shall be here. I am interested. Valond will come too. He is more anxious to redeem himself than you are to see him."

Mr. Brown takes the money, saying "Good day," as he saunters toward the Ferry, while Merki walks away in the direction of Murray Street.

Benonski, who has witnessed this interview in silent astonishment, and has followed the stranger, breaks out, as soon as they are well beyond earshot of Merki:

"You knew, then, that Merki is alive? Why did you try to deceive me?"

"Not so, Mr. Benonski! I was startled to see this

man—startled more by the close resemblance to Ferrand Merki. I almost was ready to believe your own theory that he has escaped from Hades, and is wandering about the earth again. But I have changed my mind. That man is not Ferrand Merki.”

“Why do you say that? You yourself have just been talking with him as if you knew him to be Merki. What in heaven’s name is your purpose, and how did you know about Valond, whoever he may be?”

“I know only what you know. That was revealed to me by the man himself while we talked together. I guess now that this Valond whom this unknown thinks to have been the author of your personal in the *Herald*, is some fellow of his whom he sent after Alvaroff, when it was learned that Alvaroff was alive. His words gave me a clue to guess that Valond made some failure and had not since turned up, and that his master believes that he now has information. It was simple enough when you think of it. But that was not Ferrand Merki.”

“He, and no other. Why should you say that? Who else would be hunting them down? It is Merki, of course.”

“I have been through with the whole case, Mr. Benonski. Ferrand Merki died and was buried. It was impossible that he should have survived. Therefore this can not be Merki.”

Benonski shakes his head. He was not convinced in the least.

“You recognized him. You know therefore how Merki looks. But you may not have as much reason to remember him as I have. I say this is Merki. No matter how many miracles it involves—I shall never believe otherwise.”

“Suit yourself. It is not now important. I shall know when I set myself to the task of finding out. The matter is just as mysterious to me as it is to you. But I am as certain that Ferrand Merki is dead as you are that he is alive. But we have more important matters now for a little. It is your duty now to save Alvaroff and more yet to save his daughter from this man and from any others who may be hunting for them.

And now, Mr. Benonski, as it is necessary for me to be in another place, I must leave you. Before I do, you will name the place where the arrest can be made."

"I will do it, but if harm comes to them through this word of mine you will not escape the punishment that I have in store for you. If you go to Number 602 Eighty-second Street I will be there with them to-morrow at four."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I GUARD, MYSELF, THIS TIME."

Has Benonski been indiscreet? Who knows? What madnesses have not men committed under the spell of stronger minds? Benonski, with his reason, blames himself for revealing to this stranger the hiding-place of the fugitives, but every moment his reason is baffled and defeated by his recurrent and unanswerable assertion: "I have a feeling." And who does not know that before the feeling, giving us the certainties of conviction, reason is for ever going to the wall? Besides, Benonski has a refuge. He believes that he has it in his power to save them by a desperate device, which for all these seven years has been before him as a possibility to be considered.

Yet he almost fears to meet his master after what he has done, but on the following day braces himself for the climax that has been planned. He is feverish and doubtful, justifying himself one minute for entering into a plan to save his loved ones, and cursing himself the next for having exposed them to danger. He is comforted a good deal by the reflection that Alvaroff has made up his mind to face and end the danger if they are again arrested, and Benonski hopes that in this resolution they may both be able to bear the ordeal to which they are now to be subjected.

At about two o'clock he starts, groaning inwardly, for the house where they are. When they greet him gladly, in their old affable grace, toned by the sadness imparted to them by their trials, Benonski can hardly

keep the tears from falling, and becomes heartily sick of the whole business. He almost resolved to confess his great mistake, and urge them again to flee before it is too late.

"You seem troubled, Benonski," says his master, kindly. "I hope you have heard nothing unpleasant."

"Nothing to speak about," says Benonski, stammering guiltily. But he must carry the matter off, so he adds: "Only a little low spirited. It is seeing the dead man, I think."

"I advise you to drive that out of your mind, Benonski. I have reflected upon that matter, and what you surmise is literally impossible. I wish to ask your opinion about a certain matter. I have been conferring with Brauna, and we are agreed. But I have ever counted your judgment good, Benonski. The life we are obliged now to live is not to our liking. We have cast up the chances. The law is not unerring. Evidence is not always convincing. Brauna has declared that a trial in the courts will have as little terror as this life of a suspect and a fugitive from justice. Therefore we are seriously contemplating a surrender to the authorities. If the result is unfavorable—well, we are not without experience. Experience teaches men how to endure the gravest misfortunes—even the greatest injustice. We can exhaust all the known resources of the machinery of the law to save her. The risk is not worse than our present situation. What do you say to such a plan?"

Benonski's heart grows lighter. The terror of his scheme had been taken away. Alvaroff himself is proposing the very thing that he is assisting to bring about. He reflects a moment, then replies, gravely:

"I have often thought of that. But until recently I have not dared to think it in the least advisable. Your enemies are so powerful and so merciless! But as you have said, it is but little worse than to be hunted forever. Perhaps something will intervene in your favor. At the worst they shall never have her for a prey. Benonski says so."

Ugly Benonski looks almost beautiful to them as he says this, so resolute and strong is his face and attitude.

"You advise this course then?" asks Alvaroff.

"Master, I know not what to say. Whatever you do, you know well that I am with you."

"We will think of it a little more. If it is done it will be well to secure the best attorneys for the defense, and put my affairs in order. They will not stop with her, Benonski."

"No. They are striking at you. If this is Golfi's work then he is aiming to torture you first and kill you later. Guard yourself from assassins, my master."

"That I fear not at all. Were I able to prove who is the man that killed Ferrand Merki, then Golfi might fume until doomsday. Besides, I do not despair of convincing him that I had nothing to do with the offense with which he charges me. There is some one at the door. Who, I wonder?"

As Alvaroff is speaking, the door bell rings, and in a moment voices are heard in the hall. Alvaroff is startled because he has given strict orders that no one is to be admitted.

But before they can make a move either to ascertain the cause of the intrusion or to flee from any possible peril, the climax that Benonski has anticipated is upon them. No—not as he has planned by any means, after all. He, too, is startled at hearing the sounds in the hall. He has appointed the hour of four with Mr. Brown, and it is now but three. But he has no time to reflect upon it. The door is flung open, and there before them, with his old cold, impenetrable smile, stands—John Waters!

"Ah! Our information is correct, I see," he says, abruptly. "Sergeant, there are the parties. You will both count yourselves to be under arrest. You too, Benonski. You are aiding them to escape. That ought to mean two years, at least."

He looks around the room with an air of triumph.

"It is well, Benonski," says Alvaroff, glancing at his daughter to be sure she was bearing the surprise calmly too. "You seem to be assiduous in your pursuit, Number 66. Some men remember their disappointments a long time. But you will now have a very good chance to even up the score. We will follow you."

"There is a carriage at the door," says Waters, sharply. "You will therefore come at once. I guard myself, this time. There will be no more Godby affairs. Go before, Martin. If necessary, you know what to do in case of any attempt to escape. You will be ready. Remember."

"Ah! Do not think I shall give you that advantage," says Alvaroff. "I well know how welcome my death would be in certain quarters. Therefore, be sure I shall not give you the excuse for accomplishing it. We shall not attempt to escape, sir. Lead the way."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I WILL WAIT UNTIL SHE GOES TO PRISON."

"A SEVEN YEAR OLD CRIME."—Yesterday the Grand Jury found an indictment upon an old coroner's finding, against a woman named Brauna Alvaroff, or Merki, for murder in the first degree. The woman is supposed to be the Russian adventuress who figured in the police annals at the time of the murder, and is now charged with having murdered her husband, one Ferrand Merki, in an old house in Waverley Place, since destroyed by fire. The trial is set down for next week by an agreement of the defense and prosecution to have it advanced on the calendar."

François's card comes up to Blanche early in the day upon which this item appeared in the morning papers, that gentleman himself presently following it.

"Ah! The devil is to pay, Dodo," he says, forgetting his usual politeness to her, as he enters. "I have feared as much. See this?"

"Never address me by that name again," commands the young lady, imperiously. "I am Blanche Evanston," she adds, as she reads the news, keeping her self-possession as she goes on: "Yes. It is the devil very likely. He was ever a very disagreeable individual. He will see it sooner or later. Our way is

not so clear as it seemed once, dear François." she drawls. "She is in limbo, then! That is better than to have her at large, if he were to find her out. But he is too sick to be told anything now."

"What do you hear?"

"He is no better. I have a note from Brill every morning. I should have one by this time. It is not so bad, after all. By the time he recovers, if he does recover, she may be hanged, or in Sing Sing. That leaves him to me again. I think I can console him. She has been a long time now out of his sight, and this trial will hopelessly disgrace her. A man like Vanderveer wears out in his devotion easier than some. He is worth waiting for, is he not?"

"*Pardieu!* He will die—or he will return to her. We might better look for easier game. Besides—it is not quite our policy to stay forever in one place. Some one might be from Paris, and meet you or me on the street. Have you ever thought of that?"

"So you are nervous, are you? Look out, monsieur! It is a sign you are growing old. I give up the adorable Vanderveer? Never. I will marry him yet. What has become of your fine luck that you have boasted of so much all your life? Don't be a fool now."

She is as cool and placid as ever, even while her heart is like a raging fire to hear that there is now almost a certainty that Vanderveer will hear that her rival lives.

"You are too fine by half, Miss—Miss Evanston," he sneers, "with your talk about the Vanderveer. I for one hope he will die soon and end the whole business. I have lost interest in him since he took it in his head to be so very sick."

There is a tinge of irony in d'Avigne's tone that Blanche interprets, and she asks, with a shade of anxiety:

"What does that mean? You do not think there is anything more to it?"

"I only say that it is a queer time to get sick. Have you heard from Godby's housemaid? She ought to find out."

"Nothing new. She has reported to Pierre that no one is admitted to his room save the physician and his sister. She has peeped and spied—but to no purpose. Pierre agrees with me that he is as sick as they pretend."

"Pierre and you agree a great deal lately, I observe," says her companion, with a little gesture of disdain. "You will fare better with your schemes if you call me in earlier."

"Jealous Monsieur d'Avigne. To be sure! Since you began to be so cross, Pierre is much more agreeable to me. Some day we mean to disappear together and leave you disconsolate. It is all arranged."

"Excellent! Go soon, by all means. I will furnish the means cheerfully. I have for a long time noticed how you love each other."

Blanche laughs and flirts her eyes at him, and coaxes him into a better mood.

At this juncture Anise, the maid, enters with letters. Blanche selects one in a hand familiar, and tearing it open, reads hastily, as she sets her teeth hard together. Presently she smiles; then reads aloud:

"Dear Miss Evanston: We are happy to inform you that Mr. Vanderveer is better. By my orders, to escape the noise of the street, which seems to disturb him badly, he has been carefully removed to the Jersey hills. He will communicate through his sister in a few days, and when able will be happy to receive a visit from you.

Respectfully,

"A. M. BRILL."

"What is bad about that, pray?" demands d'Avigne.

"Stupid! It means that he has already heard. Men do not get well so quickly. I was mistaken. He is a coward, and dares not face me. If there were only sickness of course a man well enough to ride to Jersey would be well enough to see his affianced wife—especially after such a breaking off of a wedding. It is all plain. What then? Why this: I will wait until she goes to prison—or worse—and begin again. Mean-

while, if you think it safer, we can change our location."

"*Mon Dieu!* I believe you are right. He is playing the coward. I could advise him if I chose, that such a course is very wise. But it is not exactly the course that suits our plans. True—we would better disappear for a little time. After this affair of the interrupted marriage you will have a good excuse to visit your dear papa in Chicago. Why not? Harlem or Brooklyn is either of them a pleasant quarter of Chicago—and quite a little nearer to New York. As for me, that no one may say that I ran off with you, I will go a few days sooner. Then, if you still mean to follow this adventure up, we can watch matters at our convenience. We will try to be at this famous trial next week. Meanwhile I think I will circulate the news privately that this 'Russian adventuress' is not a stranger in New York—in fact, is none other than——"

"Bah! Don't be that stupid, François. Will not Vanderveer know the first instant who did it? Everybody else thinks her dead. Nobody else knows that her name is Alvaroff. I know; and he knows that I know. On the contrary, I expect the time to come when I can display my sweet and beautiful forbearance and magnanimity by reminding him how I have shielded her from the gossips. Let Miss Carrington, of Graystone, rest in the sea. This 'Russian adventuress' may be disposed of by the law, and then no one can blame me for anything. Who can ever prove the letters?"

"I can," he replies, softly.

"Do not flatter yourself. Vanderveer would never believe a disappointed rival."

She laughs, and shrugs her shoulders, defiantly.

"But I will show him the letter. I have it, you recall."

"And he will ask why you stole it and withheld it. And I shall give a very good reason why you did. I shall say that you intended to use it at the last minute, or some other good lie. I can outlie you beyond all doubt, my love."

"I can not deny it," says d'Avigne, dryly. "For a

woman who has resolved henceforth to tell nothing but the truth you are doing very well."

"Bah! You know nothing about it. You have never discovered a fragment of my resources in that direction. But, tell me—what more do you know about the arrest—and the trial?"

"I have seen Godby. He assures me that it was done Sunday in some uptown house where they were hiding. They were simple to come back here."

"Not so very simple. We are here."

"But this isn't Paris."

"But we will go back to Paris after a time. Who hunted them out? Those dreadful Nihilists, no doubt. Her husband, whom she murdered, was a Nihilist."

"It was the same man who hunted them down before. Watson, was it?"

"Waters. François, I am afraid of that man. He knew at once that night that Godby was a Frenchman. He also knew there was something between Pierre and me. He has eyes like Ruel's. There was something strange about him and about that whole affair that I did not understand. I have often thought that he might be the one who let them escape. But what matters it since they are found? Let them take the chances. If Pierre is half right about it, they will neither of them escape."

"No. Probably not. These Russians are too vindictive."

"That I believe, as much as I hope it."

"What will Vanderveer do—the craven?"

"Do not forget that I have destined him for a husband. Think you I would actually marry a craven?"

"Certainly—if he had money; if I told you to do it; if the marriage were to be a cross between a farce and a robbery."

He twirls his mustache and laughs softly at her.

"I do not think it important to be angry with you. Vanderveer is a god, and that I will maintain. What will he do? Play the hero, no doubt. He is just that sentimental. He will do all he can to save her, and when he fails, he will come back to me. It may take a little time—but we have time enough. The trial

will be here so soon, the matter ought to be finished early. Besides—well, I learn through Pierre that she will not be permitted to live, whatever the courts do. The Nihilists have marked them both for destruction. The delightful Nihilists! I mean to join them myself.”

Monsieur d’Avigne does not make a very long call to-day, being quite busy with some little matters he does not mention to his fair confederate.

This very afternoon Blanche writes the following letter to her affianced:

“DEAR MR. VANDERVEER: It is with astonishment that I find it impossible to describe that I have read in the morning papers the inclosed account. In mingled hope and grief I herewith return you the ring you gave me and some other slight tokens of your regard. My hope is founded on the chance that she may escape this new danger which she has returned from the dead to meet. While I believed her in heaven I was permitted to cherish a happiness that I shall never know again, in a love that I must not now even name. Oh, my lost one! You will return to her. She was first in your heart, and my heart tells me that now she has returned, you will find your duty and your joy in moving heaven and earth for her rescue. You have misjudged me if you believed that I would not understand, and have for that reason hidden away from me. I have laid away the beautiful dresses, and with them my heart. Let us be friends, and if I can serve you or her, believe me my heart’s blood will be given without a pang. If I suffer, you ought to know me well enough to believe that I shall not display my suffering, and shall know how to satisfy society if questions become annoying. I have buried in my heart the secret of her identity, which the reports do not, as you see, reveal, and we may be able to shield from the knowledge of our common friends the truth as we know it.

“I shall retire from the world a little and be with dear papa in Chicago, while I think on the beautiful past as a dream too good to endure in this world of many disappointments. If you see fit to answer this,

a letter addressed to the old number will be forwarded to me.

“Your friend,

“BLANCHE EVANSTON.”

A master stroke indeed! She is not the woman to wait for circumstances to corner her. She takes the offensive instantly. She will disarm all suspicion by this course. He will never believe after this that she has seen the letters. He will never doubt that she is a wronged and saddened woman, as noble as she seems. She sends the letter, and then, before the day is gone, flits out of sight like a vanishing sunbeam, to weave her webs in a securer place.

CHAPTER XXV.

“STOP HIM, FOR GOD’S SAKE.”

It is the day fixed for Brauna’s trial for the murder of her husband, Ferrand Merki. Mr. Knowlton, the prosecuting attorney, is an unimaginative and literal-minded man of great precision, and utterly devoid of feeling. No detail escapes him. In a moderately strong case he is unequalled in the skill with which he marshals and correlates his evidence. On the other hand, he has little ability in an appeal to the feelings of jurors, and no great amount of skill in detecting the prevarications of witnesses. Evidence is all of one kind with him. A fact is simply a fact, and no more, but on the cold facts alone he has won about all the cases he has ever touched.

Up to the moment when the case is called, it is regarded as commonplace, merely some ordinary foreign adventuress, who is to be tried. The prisoner is thickly veiled, and sits quietly beside Mr. Bliss, the leading attorney for the defense. There is in the courtroom only the idle and motley crowd that ordinarily can be depended upon to be present at a murder trial. After calling the name of the case the clerk of the court requests the defendant to step into the pris-

oner's box. As she does so Branna raises her veil and there is a little murmur of astonishment, and from that moment there is an increase of interest in the trial.

Even the judge—a man of mature years and keen observation—stares at the apparition of loveliness with a growing sense of the importance of this case. He has supposed from the accounts that he should see some hard-faced virago with a Russian accent. But he sees at once that she is as refined as she is beautiful, and that the case will be full of difficulty. He has experience enough with criminals to be aware that crime may hide even under a fair exterior, but if judges may indulge their feelings, then perhaps Judge Wickwire, of the Superior Court, finds it difficult to believe that this saintly and beautiful woman is a murderess. Nevertheless, when he has recovered himself, he orders the crier and police officer to seat the spectators farther from the rail, taking the time meanwhile to write some minutes in his journal. Then he signifies to the prosecuting attorney that the court is ready to proceed. Mr. Knowlton rises, as little affected by the appearance of the prisoner as if she had been a wooden statue, and opens the case. He produces the coroner's finding on which the indictment has been found, relates briefly the crime as therein set forth, tells of the two escapes in the most literal and undramatic way, and then, with a trifle more of life, goes on to outline the case which the State expects to prove. As he carefully states this the power of the man begins to be seen. He has a chain of facts, and with facts he is at home. When he has woven it together in his opening speech, and trained the focus against the prisoner, it almost seems to the listener, uninterested, that the jury might safely convict without hearing the evidence. Mr. Knowlton concludes with a short speech of warning to the jury, assuring them that the facts alone are to be put forward here, and that upon these they are to convict this woman. They were not to consider her sex, because the law makes no distinction. They were not to be moved by any appeals to their feelings. If the facts proved her guilty, as they surely do, then their duty is clear to them. He pauses, and in a moment, turning to the court, he says, abruptly:

"I will now call Michael Ruoff."

Ruoff, a sleek, thin fellow in black, looking as much like a priest as a valet, takes the stand with a great air of importance.

After the usual oath and the preliminary questions as to name, age, and the like, Mr. Knowlton says:

"Do you know the prisoner at the bar?"

"Very well. Yes, sir."

"State when you saw her last."

"Seven years ago. It was the fourteenth day of June, about four in the afternoon."

"How do you remember that so exactly?"

"On account of the murder, sir."

"What occurred at that time? First, where did you see the prisoner?"

"At her home in Waverley Place."

"State what occurred at that time?"

"I was in the court behind the house, with another person who is now dead. I was in the employ at that time of Ferrand Merki, who was murdered."

"How long had you been in his employ?"

"About four years."

"In this country?"

"In Russia. I am a Russian by nativity."

"So you have said. Go on. You were in the court——"

"I heard an outcry, and the sound of some struggle within the house. We ran in at once. I was ahead. When we reached the upper room over the sitting-room we saw the prisoner."

"Go on. You saw the prisoner——"

"She had in her hand a stiletto. This is the weapon."

At that moment an officer holds up the same little stiletto with which Ferrand Merki had been slain seven years ago. Brauna seeing it, grows sick and pants in horror. Alvaroff, sitting close to the dock, gives her a little bottle of smelling salts, and she represses her feelings as quickly as possible. The witness, under the questioning of Mr. Knowlton, and without interruption by the defense, goes on to describe the room and its situation, and to state that they—he and his com-

panion—had seized the prisoner just as she was finishing her crime with the stiletto in her hand, which she had but barely drawn out from the dying man's side.

Mr. Bliss then takes the witness in hand, and succeeds in confusing him some, and in drawing out his connection and that of Merki with certain Russian Nihilists; but there is no essential shaking of his testimony.

Link by link the chain weaves itself. As it nears the demonstration of a finished case, before the day is gone, there are those in the courtroom, now nearly full of people who have been attracted to the afternoon session by the reports that have crept abroad of the beauty of the prisoner, who looked on with ghoulis satisfaction.

Well back in the crowd near the door are two men who now and then exchange glances and remarks at every point made by the prosecution. Count St. Mart Golfi and Ferrand Merki, both in slight disguise, watch the progress of the trial with breathless interest. Golfi sees in the chair near the prisoner's dock the man to whom he believes he owes his sufferings in Siberia. He glowers out under his heavy brows at this calm figure, wishing to grasp him by the throat. Merki, on the other hand, looks most of the time at Brauna, noting the incomparable beauty of her face and the royalty of her air. Both men see her doom in the steady accumulation of the testimony. The cross-examinations of the defense seem listless and inadequate, and relate mostly to unimportant details. Golfi in a low tone says to Merki, as the case is about concluded for the prosecution:

"She will be convicted. If she is, there will be a plea for leniency. The judge is likely to heed it. If the jury convict her they will recommend her to mercy. They will then send her up for life. What is your plan then?"

"Sing Sing is not so far from Jane Street, Count. I have set some strings a pulling. She will not reach any prison alive. She will be remanded to custody until she can be taken away. I know the very men who will be near her."

"Work your own purposes, Merki. It is the man, not the woman, who will feel my hand. The testimony is concluded. They will adjourn now until to-morrow."

"Not so. The judge is calling the defense. And, by heaven, they will put Vanderveer on the stand. Here he is, too."

In another part of the room two figures, sitting on the benches, silent and watchful save now and then a low word, have been observing the trial from its opening. They, too, are in disguise. They are Blanche and François. With a heart of flint, Blanche hears the whole dreadful testimony that weaves its deadly web around her rival. She has a brain as keen as that of any lawyer in all that courtroom, and is able to weigh with unerring accuracy the bearings of the case for the prosecution, like a skilled expert in law. Her penetrative apprehension is quickened and re-enforced by her hatreds and her fears.

"They will convict, they will convict!" she says, under her breath, when she sees the chain at last nearly complete. François shrugs his shoulders in the true Parisian fashion, replying, grimly:

"Let them. I shall not prevent. But they do not change my mind. The fools will never stop to see that against such a woman evidence becomes absurd. Besides—no one saw her strike. Bah! There is nothing more stupid than a jury."

"You are in love with her on first sight. That I clearly see. A murderess! They should make you a witness. You would tell them how impossible it is for a saint with such a face to do so indiscreet a thing as kill her husband."

François laughs, and at that moment the prosecuting attorney announces that the evidence for the State rests.

Then begins one of the strangest scenes ever witnessed in a courtroom—though but few present comprehended its full meaning.

"By heavens, they are calling Vanderveer," says Blanche, catching her breath and shutting her teeth. "What is that for, I wonder?"

The first witness for the defense!

As he comes out of the crowd he is pale and dignified. But he does not look as if he had been so deathly sick as Dr. Brill has reported. He appears so suddenly where he has not been before observed that François says, in some consternation:

"It is some scheme to save here, I will wager my life on it."

"I never bet unless against something of value," retorts Blanche. It has ever been her cue not to share any fears that François may express. She has thus kept his admiration of her as a woman of nerve at its level.

But her heart seems to stop nevertheless, and she fixes her eyes on the witness as he slowly walks out and takes the stand.

"Your name?" questions the court, after the oath has been administered.

"Harris Lincoln Vanderveer."

The prisoner, seeing him before her—this man whom she believes to be the husband of another woman—for Brauna and her father are still in ignorance of the postponement of his wedding—with her soul in her face grows as pale as marble, and her heaving breath is like the labor of a pent-up agony.

Why does he come here? She can bear all the rest. Her soul has been calm and strong, and she has faced death without a break of her resolutions and without a tear in her eyes. But this ordeal she has not anticipated, and for it she is not prepared.

Alvaroff, glancing at his daughter, sees her pallor, and notes her pang of emotion. He, too, is astounded that the defense should bring to the stand as the first witness in this case this man who has made for them more anguish than all their perils. To her and to him Vanderveer has become but a torturing memory to be lived down. They both had hoped never again to look upon his false face.

But he is here! He does not look at her. He studiously avoids her eyes. He remains perfectly calm resting his hand upon the court Bible as if leaning for support in a heavy duty.

"Your Honor," says Mr. Bliss, quietly, and with an air of importance, "we have not thought it necessary to outline the course of defense. We will rely upon the testimony of this witness to clear our client, corroborated by several who will follow him, merely to supply a few details that he will not be able to furnish. There is a very good reason why we have adopted an unusual course. We might indeed have saved your Honor the time consumed by the prosecution in this case by a different course, but we preferred that our client should have the advantage of the full immunity from all farther prosecution, not to say persecution, such as accrues to a person who has been tried and acquitted. As we take this course, it may be proper to observe to the court that it is for this reason we have made no objection to many of the gross irregularities and informalities of the prosecution. Mr. Vanderveer, who murdered Ferrand Merki?"

Vanderveer is erect now, lifting his fine head aloft like a man looking into heaven.

"I myself. Ferrand Merki married the woman I loved. I killed him. I am here to tell the circumstances."

A great wave of sensation goes around the courtroom, in the midst of which a woman's voice rises like a bell:

"No, no. Stop him, for God's sake!"

But somebody directly behind her—a man in the dress of a country merchant, draws her down into her chair, murmuring very softly in a voice she can not resist:

"Not a word. If you love him, be quiet. All is well."

"Your Honor," goes on Vanderveer, coolly, after the wave of sensation had subsided, and silence is restored, "I appreciate the reluctance of the prisoner to this course which I take. It does more honor to her than anything I shall say can do to me. But I have kept silence for seven years only because she refused to let me speak. She was safe, I thought. I loved her, and we together concealed this crime. It was attributed to her, but while she was not in danger of prosecu-

tion, I consented to allow it to be forgotten. But when, but a short time ago, I found that she had been seized by the human ghouls who are interested to follow her, I knew my course clearly. The prisoner, Mrs. Merki, I first met when she was Miss Alvaroff, in the city of Moscow, in the year 1874. She and her father, unknown to me, were implicated in certain Nihilistic plots, concerning which there are men now in this room who know far more than I."

He sweeps his eyes around, and Golfi says to Merki, in a whisper:

"He knows too much. How shall we stop this?"

"Wait," says Merki, with a tigerish glitter of his feline eyes.

"This Nihilistic conspiracy culminated one day in the seizure by the officers of the government of a large number of the Nihilists, who were deported to Siberia. Ferrand Merki was one of the number who managed to escape. He was also enamored of the daughter of Alvaroff, the prisoner at the bar. By some means unknown to me, as I have learned from herself, he managed to make it appear that Alvaroff was about to be seized and would not escape death. She was but a girl, not sixteen years of age, as you have heard. Merki revealed to her both his own passion and the danger of her father."

"Your Honor, I hope, does not permit all this as testimony," interposes Mr. Knowlton, dryly. He is as little moved by this turn of affairs as he has been by the beauty of the prisoner.

"I will order it recorded," says the judge, after a moment's thought, "and determine later what part of it may go to the jury. It seems quite unnecessary to raise the question, if the witness confesses the crime. Proceed, Mr. Vanderveer."

The judge leans back in his chair, watching the course of the case with minute attention.

"Under the stress of Merki's threats she was induced to marry him, the condition being that Alvaroff should be warned, and gotten out of Moscow in time to escape the seizure.

"The marriage," goes on Vanderveer, "was indeed

contracted and solemnized, Miss Alvaroff assuring her father that she loved the man Merki. He would never have consented otherwise, even though his life had paid for the refusal. The prisoner, her father, and Ferrand Merki, together, came to New York. The marriage had no sooner been solemnized than the prisoner, shocked at what she had done, even though she believed she had saved her father, revealed to Alvaroff her loathing for Ferrand Merki. Merki was ugly and brutal. She was pure and refined. Alvaroff protected her from her husband and refused him the slightest access to her presence. I was at that time a youth of scarce twenty-one. When I found that this girl, whom I loved with the ardor that often comes at such an age, had fled from Moscow with Merki and Alvaroff, I followed as soon as I could. I reached this city on the very next day after them and found the place where they were. I was hot-blooded and full of my youthful conceits. I did not mean to commit crime; but on going to the house in Waverley Place on the afternoon of the fourteenth of June, 1874, I heard from Merki himself that she was already his wife. I doubted it, and told him he was a liar. He was insulting and vindictive. He feared that, as I had announced that I was just from Moscow also, he might find in me an agent of the government, or some one who would give him trouble. We had a fierce dispute in one of the lower rooms of the house where he was killed. I demanded to see Miss Alvaroff and know whether he was telling the truth. I afterward learned that he himself was then in that house to demand her, and to set a watch on them, lest they should fly from him and defeat his aims. The witnesses for the prosecution who testified that the—the tragedy, occurred in a room upstairs, are simply mistaken. I found Merki that day in a room that was used for a library, and was situated on the east side of the main hall. It was there he was stabbed. He must have crawled up the stairs and made the outcry that was heard by this man Ruoff, after I was out of the house. When I struck him he was in the act of taking a revolver from the table. The records will show that the revolver was found by the

coroner on the floor of the library. If further search had been made, doubtless blood would also have been found there. Merki was maddened by my persistence. I was certain that he would shoot me with the revolver. I, too, was in a rage. That stiletto, which the witness Ruoff, I suppose, has displayed, and which is admitted here in evidence, lay on the table, or somewhere near my hand. I could not swear how my hand fell on it. I only know that when I saw Merki reach for the revolver, with his back partly turned away from me, I struck him with it with all my strength. I know not how many times I struck, but realizing in an instant that I must have wounded him, perhaps fatally, I rushed out of the house. When I learned that Merki had been killed and that Alvaroff and his daughter were under arrest, she charged with the murder, I assisted them to escape. I, and I alone, am guilty of the death of Ferrand Merki."

The courtroom flies into a great and increasing buzz at this, which the judge quiets at length, ordering the case to proceed.

Vanderveer resumes:

"There is little more to be said. The secret has been kept all these years. Last summer the prisoner was about to be arrested at a country-seat called Graystone, on Long Island, near the Jamaica beaches. She escaped. Now they are arrested and dragged into court. In this emergency she should have been prepared to understand that I would not be silent while a woman stands falsely in peril of conviction for a crime of which she is as innocent as a babe in arms. I have no more to say."

Mr. Knowlton is at his weakest point when he conducts the cross-examination of such a witness. But he undertook it nevertheless, only to bring out more clearly to the jury a mass of confirmatory details that absolutely made him believe that the witness was indeed the guilty man. Nevertheless he did not abandon the case. It would have occurred to a more imaginative man that such a development pointed to a possible conspiracy to save the prisoner. But Mr. Knowlton never saw below the bare facts as adduced

in the testimony. He very quickly understood that the testimony of Vanderveer left all the testimony of the prosecution uncontradicted, and still cleared the prisoner. She may have taken the dagger from the wound, and still Vanderveer's story might be absolutely true. But the other witnesses were put on. There was a friend, a Mr. Glasgow, who swore that Vanderveer and the prisoner at the bar, with Alvaroff and one Benonski, came down to a certain wharf where he had a boat waiting, under the impression that it was some elopement, and that he and others who had gotten the boat ready, carried them off to a shore town. Then came Benonski, who, to the amazement of his master, declared that Vanderveer had tried to induce him on that fatal day to arrange an interview for him with the prisoner, and had threatened in his hearing to take the life of Merki. He also declared that Vanderveer had undertaken, while in Moscow, to enlist Benonski's sympathies in his suit, and had endeavored to arrange an elopement there without success. There was a complete chain of testimony around Vanderveer's story.

The judge is perhaps not satisfied, but his Honor turns to the jury, saying:

"Gentlemen: It is my duty to instruct you that if you find from the facts and evidence, and I think you must, that the defendant is not guilty, you will bring in a verdict of not guilty. On the other hand, should you find on such facts that the defendant is guilty, you will bring in a verdict to that effect."

Under the charge of a Deputy Sheriff, the jury withdrew.

She hears! He is to take her place. He is to take her disgrace. He is to succeed with this conspiracy of falsehoods in clearing her at his own expense. Monstrous and incredible! Her soul shrieks its protest within her. Her strained nerves are ready to burst. She shakes off that overpowering touch on her shoulder and struggles to her feet, with eyes like the blaze of a fire in the night.

"Silence! Sit down! You will ruin all," says the magnetic voice at her ear,

"Never, never," she begins to say. She meant to shriek out her truth against these lies, and to denounce this plot with the frenzy of her outraged soul. But as she rises, Vanderveer turns and looks her full in the face.

"Sit down, Brauna. I love you. I command."

His voice thrills with all the old passion that has stirred her to her adoration of him in the days gone by, and into her eyes he is pouring all the intense, sweet glory of his devotion. She knows it all. He is doing it for love. Her senses begin to reel. The strain has been too great. There is a choking of her breath, she utters a low cry, and then, like a broken, wounded bird, she sinks back on her father's supporting arm, with a faint, low cry of despair.

"Give the prisoner air. Bring ice water," says the judge. "Officer, clear the courtroom."

At this point the jury returns, and the foreman being asked by the court if they had reached a finding, replies:

"Yes, your Honor. We find the defendant not guilty!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"TO-DAY I SURRENDER LIFE—AND SPEAK."

Was this, then, all a plot?

The machinery of the law has been overtaken with a surprise. The judge has been doubtful and the jury nonplussed. No extensive preparation had been made by the State, under the impression that the prisoner was a nobody and would be capable of making little defense. The ease with which the prosecution, without resistance, had been able to hasten on the trial, was now explained. There had been a stampede, and the prosecuting attorney was so wedded to the facts as they appeared in the apparently natural course of the case, he did not even think to move for an adjournment until the jury had given their verdict. The judge had thought it all strange, and yet he had

to confess that Vanderveer's story on the witness stand was supported by seemingly honest witnesses, and had a good aspect of reality. At all events, if any mistake had been made it is now too late to return. The commonest principle of criminal law, to say nothing of the statutes of New York State, prevents her ever being tried again on the same charge for the same offense. The State has as a consolation, safely jailed in Ludlow Street, the aristocratic witness who has confessed himself the guilty party. But the judge would have said, that even after the confession, Vanderveer probably could never be convicted of anything worse than a criminal conspiracy to defeat justice, as an accessory after the fact, possibly, of persons who have now been acquitted of a crime that can not be punished. But Vanderveer was likely to go to prison. If he disprove his confession he will be indicted as a perjurer and a conspirator.

Benonski has been satisfied. Mr. Brown has kept his word to the letter. He has carried out a program full of difficulties, and so daring and desperate that the very improbability that any one would attempt it has contributed to its success. Benonski, walking out of court knowing that the trial is over, is nevertheless not happy. The trial has been the means of breaking down the strength of his dear mistress, and she has been carried to their apartments more dead than alive. And in the dead of night, as secretly as they can, she is removed to a safer place. Alvaroff knows that this has not ended the enmity against them, and that what his enemies have failed to do by the courts they will now attempt to do by more direct means. Brauna recovers her senses and her memory after a few hours. She begs her father to tell her what it all means, but he knows as little as she. He was astonished that such a scheme had been worked, but in his concern for his swooning dear one, had no opportunity to think what he ought to do before the court was adjourned. Even after three days, during which the amazement of Alvaroff's mind has not much abated, she is still under the utter prostration due to the strain and shock of the trial, and all his time and care are bestowed upon her.

Surprise and consternation swept through society in Vanderveer's circles when it was spread abroad that he had been arrested and jailed on a charge of murder. But the public immediately accepted the theory which started into life at once, that he had merely sacrificed himself successfully for the woman. It began to be said among the lawyers that a cunning legal fraud had been perpetrated, and the judge and jury were dissected and ridiculed by the law offices, as if they had been the veriest simpletons. But those who said so had not been present at the trial. They had not taken into account the fact that the author of this defense, now fast becoming memorable in the annals of conspiracy, had made a fictitious case that was more real and more impenetrable than the truth itself. If the trial were to be had over again, unless the prisoner herself could be brought to speak, the same defense would baffle all the detectives in the metropolis. It would also clear the prisoner. And behind it was a power, embodied in the brain and will and soul of a man, spurred on by motives the strongest that sway the human heart.

And now the witnesses have disappeared, the jury has acted, the ground can not be re-traversed. She is free forever from this danger.

It is nearly two weeks after the trial.

Brauna, with the resiliency of a perfect youth, has recovered from the almost deadly prostration. One thing above all others has brought back to her a new life and a spirit of almost glorified peace. That one thing is the memory of the look and the words of Vanderveer in the courtroom:

"Sit down, Brauna. I love you. I command."

"I love you!"

And faithful Benonski has added to this the overwhelming information that for her in her danger, at the last hour, almost, he has broken off his intended marriage. For the rest, why should she ever weep again? True, he is in her place, but she will see to that. She will unweave this web of falsehoods, and save him, no matter at what expense. And whatever happens now, come death, come shame, come flight or peril or enemy, he loves her, and that is enough.

From this dream of peace, resolving how to save him, she is awakened one day by an unwelcome intruder.

As Brauna and her father sit together in their little parlor whither Benonski has brought them, conversing about the proper course to pursue toward Mr. Vanderveer, a note was brought up from the door.

Alvaroff opens it and reads:

"I must see you instantly. Your life may depend upon it. It is time for me to speak.

"JOHN WATERS."

"That strange, bitter man! He has found us again."

"No, no. He has followed us, he will do us more harm. For heaven's sake, papa, let us flee."

"He alone can not harm us, dear. If he meant to do so, he would not have sent this. Brauna, I know not what to say about this man. Even in that hour when he made the last arrest—somehow, I could not feel that he was the bitter enemy he seemed, even when my reason most clearly told me so. But if he is, he can not arrest us again. And he says our lives may depend. I do not fear him, dear."

And in that moment, after all that they had seemed to suffer because of him, Brauna herself, strangely enough, remembered not his cold smile, but the look of that night at Graystone, when, gazing into her eyes, his own filled with tender devotion, he had said:

"When my life can serve you I shall lay it down as the most worthless thing I have."

She bows her head in thought a moment, and then says, doubtfully:

"Do as you think best, then. If he harms us it is nothing now."

Alvaroff is quick to understand. Nothing matters now. Nothing can disturb her, since she knows that Vanderveer is true to her. Accordingly he sends word for the calier to be shown up.

The gentleman enters very quietly, saying:

"I greet you, sir—and you, madam. Pardon me, but there is need of haste. I feared I was too late.

Since I am not, you will be safe a little longer. Alvaroff, you have recognized me. Seven years ago, in Moscow, you learned a secret that explains all I am and have done. I have imparted that secret to your daughter also. You know the ill-success with which I had the misfortune to meet."

He pauses, looking first at Alvaroff and then at Brauna. He is as delicate and unruffled as ever.

Alvaroff, feeling a little return, perhaps of his fear and repulsion, replies, coldly:

"Kindly explain. Perhaps you have come to make more arrests. Arrests seem to be a favorite occupation with you. I do not remember to have invited you."

"I shall speak. To you both I shall no longer be a living riddle—if perchance you ever happen to honor me with any thought whatever. You have seen me on two important occasions in the guise of an enemy. For my own satisfaction, I am about to prove to you that I am your friend. Once, with the keen sting of a whip of scorpions, Alvaroff, you lashed me as a man who could revenge a rejection with hatred. My lips were at that time sealed, but to-day I surrender life and speak. I am a friend. I have never been anything else."

He turns to her. Again that volcanic fire of love, of passion, of disappointment, of devotion and fidelity flames in his eyes till it irradiates his face. She sees it, shrinks from it, wonders at it. So for a moment he stands, like a statue. Then the look fades, and the old calm smile is once again in its place as he resumes:

"If I had the right—which, alas! I have not—I would more fully tell you why I am a friend. But you shall no longer think, being just and also generous, that I am a man capable of cherishing a spite. When I opened my heart once to you, and then last year to her, I put out all the truth there is in man, for no man has any truth but his love. Because I love, I have saved you both."

He pauses, and Brauna starts and looks at him as in a dream. That sonorous, magnetic tone into which

he had fallen—where has she heard it? Suddenly she is in the courtroom again. She is hearing Vanderveer on the witness stand. Again she feels that touch on the shoulder—that commanding voice that controlled her there like the voice of Destiny. She stares now at this strange man a moment, her hand over her heaving breast.

“My God! You are the old man—Mr. Brown! It was you, then. My God!”

“You have guessed it. I did not dare trust even Benonski. It was my duty to live until you two were safe. I used Benonski as much as I must. I am Mr. Brown. I have conferred with Mr. Vanderveer. He and I together perfected the plan by which you will go free. It was I who broke off his wedding. It was I who put Godby on guard alone in order that you might be sure to escape. It is I who have now come to say that before another day dawns you must be far away from this city. Saying that, I take my life in my hands, for you.”

“Mr. Waters,” says Alvaroff, after a long pause. “I believe you. Little as we could know, and successfully as you have deceived everybody, there has never been a time when my heart said to me that you were a villain. Forgive us both for our unfaith.”

Waters gave a little gesture of impatience.

“Who is entitled to forgive? I have not been wronged. I have had the greatest joy that ever comes to man. I have been able to serve—her.”

He turned away with a sigh, and then went on, dreamily:

“But I myself am willing to seek forgiveness that, doing it, I was also obliged to wound you both. That is past now. I am already so far discredited that I can not deceive any longer the men from whose power I would save you. I am therefore under no more necessity for disguises. I shall now break their power and save you by other means. Alvaroff, you are marked for immediate death. Your daughter will die with you—if you die. Count St. Mart Golfi knows where you are. I happen to know that of all the men marked for death by the Brotherhood since

America became a rendezvous, I only have been able to rescue a few. Their track has been a trail of blood, and they have seldom failed. If I myself am not already marked, I soon shall be. We must both act. I shall break Golfi's confederacy in pieces. You will be safe after I have done it."

"But Golfi is mistaken. I had nothing to do with the betrayal of the patriots. Why does he think so?"

"Because you escaped. Because he has been told that the officers of the Czar were seen at your house. He believes it. Now I wish to know why she has also been condemned?"

"That is as mysterious to me as to you. Golfi—is he then a man to strike the innocent?"

"No. He has suffered. He has traversed Siberian mountains in winter. He has felt on his back the dreadful knout. He has nursed hatred to tyrants from the bosom of untold misfortunes. But he has some reason unknown to me for the edict against her. What other enemy has she?"

"None?"

"I am hazarding a guess. Has any one ever hinted to you that Ferrand Merki escaped death and still lives?"

Alvaroff, startled and puzzled, at once reveals Benonski's account of meeting a man who resembled Merki.

"I have seen this man. I also know that he is in communication with Golfi. But he can not be Merki. Merki died seven years ago."

"So I believe. But the question alarms me. Mr. Waters, do you surmise any connection between this pursuit and the existence of this man who resembles Ferrand Merki?"

"That I will find out. Leave that to me. He resembles Ferrand Merki enough to make me suspicious. But I have not the same means for penetrating secrets in Jane Street that I once enjoyed. Let us now think only of the main thing. There is a provision for your escape. I have not been idle since the day of the court. If you will accept my advice then I will send you for a short time to inhabit a few feet of sand.

On it is a hut where provisions have been made for your comfort. When my work in this city has been finished I will signal you from my steam yacht some morning, and on it you shall be landed in nine days in the harbor of Bordeaux. I await your decision."

Alvaroff now sees in this man a hero, whom an hour ago he had half believed a villain. It is not what he has said, for indeed he has made very little explanation beyond the barest assertions. It is rather the man himself.

"We will go, of course," quickly replies Alvaroff. "What you have already done entitles you to our entire confidence. Brauna, my daughter, what do you say?"

She has not dared to speak. She is filled with remorse for having wronged him. But when her father appeals to her, she looks in Waters's face with her old frank, sweet grace, and replies, in a low voice:

"Mr. Waters, we shall not doubt you again. May God bless you as a friend in need. We will follow your course as you may direct—you and papa."

"There is little enough time. I myself will go with you part of the way."

Brauna, burning at the cheeks, looks at him with a question almost shrieking to be asked. She fears to wound this great heart—and yet she will never stir from this house until she knows. Of that she feels sure. He sees her, and does he not know what that look means? A little flush of color comes into his own face, too. But he shuts his teeth as the smile dies on his lips. He has not left her unanswered.

"I have planned all the other matters that might interest you here," he says, his voice sounding a little hard and strained. "Mr. Vanderveer will really never be tried. Nobody in New York is so stupid now as not to have seen through our little machinery of lies. But for fear that that man Knowlton may try to get even with us by sending Mr. Vanderveer to prison, if he can, for a criminal conspiracy—well, he will mysteriously escape from the jail a day or two before the trial. I really have an idea that he will sail on the same deck that takes us to Bordeaux."

There is a little cool exultation in his manner, as he lifts his face and smiles again, and if anything can repay a man who is torturing his own heart for the benefit of a rival, Brauna's look of gratitude and delight may have repaid John Waters.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"IT IS I WHO LOVE YOU."

Mr. Knowlton was not so well convinced as a less literal-minded man might have been that Vanderveer had been merely conspiring. He fully expected to convict him on the court records. He also determined to make him an example to such a degree that the ridicule which he has incurred will be repaid. He was a man who never tired of waiting for his compensations, and he does not hasten Vanderveer's trial in the least, preferring to take ample time for all further proofs of his guilt that can possibly be gained. Meanwhile, Vanderveer has opportunity to discover what accommodations Ludlow Street jail can furnish for an aristocrat who has never known anything worse in his life than the luxuries of a rich man's mansion. But those who think that heroism is confined to the poor have not remembered history. Vanderveer was permitted to have the attention of his friends, and his lot was made tolerable by them; but it is hard enough to prove that he could bear adversity with equanimity. So far as jail life was concerned, he would have complained of nothing had it been far worse. But when the days went by and he heard nothing from John Waters and the plans which he believed would be consummated for his safety, he begins to doubt and grow uneasy. He is generous and brave, but not patient and constant. Of an artistic temperament, he is very sensitive to surrounding influences. As the charm and magnetism of Waters's actual presence wore away, he was assailed by questions, and tormented by the possibilities suggested by his fertile imagination.

that began to make him very miserable. Not a word from the man who alone can save him! Not a word from the woman whom he loves! Not a word from Benonski!

What if Waters has played false? What if he has purposes of his own? What if he has remembered Vanderveer's former insults and has somehow planned this out of revenge? And with these mental follies Vanderveer built and built an increasing and colossal fear, that was fast becoming torture as the days went by.

He saw that there was a chance that he may have been deceived. After all, it might be that this Waters, who has spoken so warmly of Brauna—it might be that he is enamored of her. It might be that he would be willing to save her for his own reasons, and be rid of an only rival for the same reasons. His soul swore to him that it could not be, while his miserable fears kept suggesting that it might be. Men have been as cunning before—and as deceptive. Waters has charmed him and convinced him, but a villain setting himself to a great plot might have done it—perhaps.

Thus the imaginative fool for days conned and fancied and built hypotheses, and strung together theories and chafed himself sore of soul and heart.

In the midst of it Satan comes to comfort him—Satan in skirts, and with more than the smile of angels!

He had sent a careful answer to Blanche's letter, full of regret at the pain he had given her, and thanking her for her sweet forbearance and good-will. And Waters, seeing that Vanderveer suspects nothing, has kept his own suspicions to himself. She is an enigma even to Waters; he only guesses, but by no means is sure, that she is a wicked woman. As for Mr. James Smith, Vanderveer has investigated him, and that person has proved equal to all questions. He confesses that he has told Waters that Vanderveer received the letter from Brauna, and the letter itself was found, strangely enough, in one of Vanderveer's pockets. When found it bears a postmark and is in an en-

velope, and gives no sign of being merely an inclosure to Blanche. Vanderveer is able to explain how he may have missed seeing it. Smith has a right to open it, as it has come to the office, and the generous fellow blames himself, and thinks it a careless accident that he never received the letter. He explains the matter in detail to Mr. Waters, who keeps silent and does not inform him that Mr. James Smith is no other than Godby of the Graystone affair. He has no interest in exposing Blanche, even if he believes that she had a hand in holding back that letter. If Vanderveer believes in her, let him.

She is all clear in his eyes, therefore, when, after he has been in Ludlow Street jail for over two weeks, she comes in upon him one day like a dazzling vision of innocence and light.

Like other tempters, whether in skirts or not, she is most timely with his miserable suspicions, and so becomingly tender, sad, and sympathetic!

She greets him without embarrassment, and permits her gloved, warm hand to linger delicately a moment in his grasp.

He thinks she has suffered and this touches his pride. No man is without vanity enough to exult in the thought that a beautiful woman loves him.

"Of course it is all a wretched mistake," she says, in a low voice. "I wish I knew who is doing it."

She coos and purrs on him, and makes him feel how beautiful is her soft friendship. Here is a woman who can forgive and love even after all that has happened. Vanderveer looks at her in admiration and delight. She is so beautiful, so frank, and sweet, and delicate.

And when they had talked ten minutes, little by little, she has led him into a confidential mood, and he opens to her his heart. He tells her all the story of the plot, of Waters and Benonski, and the trial.

Indiscreet gusher! He would have told her anything whatever!

As he goes on, Miss Evanston becomes sadder and more stern. She affects to catch her breath in astonishment and indignation! Of course she has thought

out all that matter before. She has known nothing of Waters's part, nor of his attitude, but she knew very well that it has been a plot. But to Vanderveer she is most horribly astonished, as if such a web of things was something foreign to all her previous experience. But there were some questions here and there that instantly alarmed Vanderveer. She wanted to know about this man Waters.

"He has not been here to see you, you say?" and:

"He planned to go away with her—with them, I mean?" and

"Oh! He really agreed to get you out of this?"

What did she mean? Did she at once doubt Waters on the mere narration?

"You remember Waters, do you not? The man whom you met at Graystone?"

She casts down her eyes and seems to shrink from answering. At last, in a low, strained tone, as if forced to it, she drags out this cunning lie:

"Yes. That is—well—Brauna told me—but I must not tell that. She said it in confidence. Dear Mr. Vanderveer, please do not ask me about that man."

"For God's sake, what do you mean? Tell me if there is anything. Oh, Miss Evanston, I am tortured about that man day and night. Why does he not come?"

"Well—I will tell, then. Nothing shall prevent. Whoever else may have been conspiring to ruin you, you have one friend. Very well. Brauna told me that this man Waters proposed to her that very evening."

"Oh, my God! I see it all. He is a scoundrel then, after all. Then I am lost."

"No. But you were simple to trust that fellow. Oh, Mr. Vanderveer, if only you did not love her. And I do not dare tell you the rest. You would not believe—because you are madly in love. But why have you not heard from her then? Do you think any man or woman of the world, or heaven, or hell, could prevent me from coming here were I in her place?"

She flushes and flames on him with her eyes, in which so many times he has seen her adoration. He stares at her stupidly, saying, hoarsely:

"Speak! Tell me what you mean?"

"Nothing. I will say no more. But I will see to it that you do not suffer much longer. I will show you that I have not only the power but the will to defeat this man Waters. Be of good cheer! I will have you out of this jail before you know it—or I am not the woman I believe myself to be."

There is something about her now that she has never before revealed to Vanderveer. She is strong, decisive, and powerful, and seems to have taken on the age and skill of a woman of years. But it is only for a moment, and then the doll-like face resumes its placidity and sweetness.

"You shall speak. I will know all that you know—and suspect. If I have been deceived—speak, I say."

The simpleton! As if she was not burning like a volcano to let out her lies!

"Oh, Harris! If you did not love her—if only I were the woman—don't listen to me. How can I help my love? But don't listen to me, I say. I am a jealous rival. I don't love her. I—I hate her. There! Now you will not ask me to speak. Oh, I was her friend—I did try to be generous, to forget, to wish her all good—because you love her. But how can I? How can I? She has robbed me of you—of you! Now if I say a word you will know that it is merely because I am jealous. I will go. I will never see you again."

She turns away. She is in tears—such as a saint might shed after the confession of a fault. She is beautiful, delicate, self-reproachful. For him, he thinks, she has suffered. For him she has tried to be generous and kind to her rival. For him she has come here to show her friendship. And for him she will not now say what she has in her heart about Brauna. Then again he adjures her to tell. He is bound to torment himself all he can. She knows something. He must hear it. So she reluctantly goes on:

"Call this all a jealous lie if you like, dear," she says, still crying. "But she did care for that man. She had a struggle to choose you. If he had spoken first

he would have her and not you. If she has gone away, be sure he has not stayed behind to concern himself about saving a man who alone stands in the way of his suit. I do not say she will give up at once—but you know what a man he is. How will it be, think you, when he is with her every minute—with his comfort, his sweet words, his——”

“Stop! Stop! You torture my heart. Oh! let me get out then, that I may prevent him. Oh! the cursed scoundrel!”

“Foolish man! He only does what any shrewd man with no conscience might do. And she believes you long ago married to—to me.”

She shot off this falsehood at a venture, reflecting that he could not know whether she was lying, or only mistaken, if she had told the matter wrongly.

“What! He has not told her then. Stupid damned driveling idiot that I am, not to see! She believes me false—she believes me married! And he is with her all this time to whisper that lie—and to make love to her.”

“Why not? Vanderveer, let it be so. You loved her—you love her. But has not all this taught you—well, has it not taught you that one woman in all this world loves you more than she? Think you I would be saved by such a sacrifice as that, and never give a sign? Use your own reason. What if she does believe you married? Did it kill my love when I knew that you would go to another woman’s arms? Oh! my darling one! Can a woman love who for days has known that you are about to be tried for your life, and sends not even one poor flower to you? Why does she leave New York with you in danger? They should never take me. My dead body alone would ever go while you needed a friend. But don’t hear me. It is infamous in me to torment you thus. Forget it, dear. Say it is only the spite of a jealous woman. No! No! You can’t say that. I—it is I who love you. Vanderveer, if she is gone, for God’s sake think of me. You believed when you thought her dead that with me you could still be happy. Happy! Happy!—my God, we would have been happy, too. You would have forgot-

ten her. But now—unless I have lied—unless my suspicions are merely the ravings of jealousy—then she is worse than dead—she is with—John Waters—she is hearing the voice of a man whom once she almost preferred to you. Oh, Harris! It is not too late. We can be happy still. Far away, far from the sight of her face, far from the bane of her fortunes—Vanderveer, I will save you. I will make your life one long dream of glory. I can and will. She love? It is the vanity of nothingness. Where is she, then? But I am here. Had I dreamed—had I suspected, long ago would I have been here. Vanderveer, as God lives I will make you forget that there is another woman in the world but me. You did love me once, dear. Love me still.”

How she coos on him. How the sensuous, soft breath fans him like zephyrs, and how the poison sinks in. Her very warnings that he is not to believe her make him believe her. Her very confession of her jealousy compels him to say that she is honest as heaven. And his senses are thrall'd again by her beauty. He is stung by her repeated reminder that the woman he has saved has not even sent him so much as a flower. He believes her lie that she has once cared more or less for Waters. He remembers the subtle, strange, magnetic fascination of Waters's presence. He recalls how softly and thrillingly he ever has named her or spoken of her. He feels sure that Waters loves her. And while this beautiful woman is near he can not resist her. How she loves him! How vilely has she been treated! How wretchedly in this tangle of fortune has she fared. And he has indeed once almost loved her!

The next day the temptress comes again, and then again. Still no word from the friends who have agreed to save him. He hears that Knowlton has made and is making the most strenuous efforts. Without Waters he will be convicted. Without the witnesses whom Waters has trained, at hand to deny their lies, he will be sent to the rope on his own confession. And they do not come! They make no sign. While now, every day, this siren, soft as sunshine and cunning as a devil, whispers her temptations in his ears. She can save him, and she will.

She has the plot all ready to develop. Mr. Smith is converting all the property into cash and sending it on to another country, whither they will flee together. By the unusual grace of the jail officials, purchased, or obtained by more effective means, she is allowed to be here and to stay long. She plays on him with all her arts. She uses her eyes, and her smile, and her persuasive arguments. They will be happy, she says. The world is well lost. In her arms he shall forget that ever another woman lived on earth. In her adoration his days shall be one long dream of glory. She will charm away forever his dreams of the past.

Can any man with the desire for freedom resist that? And here is a woman, with the face of an angel and the sweetness of a cherub, ready to fling the world and all things away for his sake, plying him with all her sensuous allurements and endearments, who means to do what Waters has promised and has failed to do—set him at liberty and grant him escape to another land. And he has only to accept her. If she releases him then he knows that his honor will be bound to fulfill the whole arrangement.

He does not say that he has yielded. Does not tell Blanche that with her he will flee and leave all things else behind. But in his heart, after ten days of this siege, he knows that this is the course he will take if nothing interrupts. Blanche knows it too, and her soul is again swelling in the expectancy of a triumph that now she will achieve.

The machinery is all ready to be set in operation. A certain railway train, that leaves at half-past eleven in the evening, is to bear them away. On that night his cell will be left unlocked. The jail door will mysteriously open before him. It will be days before the escape will be known by any one who will be interested to report it.

As the day approaches Vanderveer gets as feverish as a fire. He has, underneath, the consciousness that this is a wretched ending of the great plot concocted by himself and John Waters. But he wants to be away from it all. He has made provision for inform-

ing his sister of everything after he is well out of the city. He will go to the ends of the earth, and live another life with this incomparable woman whose love is now all that is left him.

The day comes! At ten o'clock he will go out.

But at six o'clock he is startled by a remarkable coincidence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"NOW DIE."

On the 31st of March, 1881, Alexander II., Czar of all the Russias, was assassinated. The Executive Committee of the Nihilist fraternity succeeded on the following day, in spite of all the precautions of the military and police, in posting their declaration all over the empire.

"The Executive Committee never drop their weapons," it said. "Russia, exhausted by famine, worn out by the arbitrary proceedings of the administration, continually losing her sons on the gallows, or in the mines, in exile—Russia can not live thus. She demands liberty. Every violator of the will of the people is the nation's enemy and tyrant."

Five of the assassins, or rather accomplices of the bomb thrower who killed the Czar, were executed. One of them was a woman of rank. But Nihilism was not terrified. The League that stood behind Hartmann and his companions still made bombs in St. Petersburg itself. Their placards were to be seen almost at the doors of the palace.

Horror filled the civilized world. Monarchs were guarded in their capitals with redoubled vigilance. The detectives of government in every city of Europe and America were set on the *qui vive* for the possible outbreak of anarchy and violence. The anarchistic circles of Chicago were put under close surveillance for thirty days. In New York there was unusual stir among the police, and Russia in New York, and every man with a Russian name, and every agitator who

was suspected of violent sentiments, became an object of their watchfulness.

It was upon this day that John Waters, for the last time, enters the secret retreat of the Nihilists in Jane Street.

Count St. Mart Golfi, sitting again at his table, has just been told that the blow has fallen upon the crowned symbol of Russia's oppressions. A grim smile plays upon his face. He is remembering that Siberia is also Russia, and that the blood of an emperor is repaying the dreadful gashes of the knout, that still sting in the ridges of his scarred and harried flesh. He believes that patriotism has dealt this blow. He believes that the rights of man have been tremendously vindicated before the throne of fate in symbols of blood. He has abandoned long ago the patience of peaceful agitation and the limits of the golden rule. The law of retaliation alone is sacred in the ethics of Count St. Mart Golfi and his followers of the League.

But in that very hour his grim joy in the death of the Czar is strangely shadowed. He knows not why. He had believed that when he should know that the deed was done, for which he had helped to prepare, he would be light of heart again, because one less of earth's tyrants vexed the world by living in it. He is waiting now for signals from across the sea. It may be that he and all these gloomy men will be needed there in the revolution which they hope for.

But he knows not why he is filled, in this moment of his victory, with a sadness and a foreboding that clouds the rose light of his exultation.

The great deed is accomplished, the lesser one is about to be. At midnight of the previous day Ferrand Merkianda dozen picked men have started out from the city on an errand of death as dreadful as the deed just consummated in Russia. They have proved to themselves that John Waters is guiding the escape of Alvaroff the traitor. They will fool no more with the satires of American court justice. Night and day they have watched and scoured and searched for a trace, and now they have found it.

Count St. Mart Golfi, sitting there at his table, is again startled by the entrance of John Waters.

He instantly reflects that he has come without the usual warnings from his guards at the doors. This not only startles, but also puzzles him. He looks up at Waters with a black scowl in his face, and then glances about swiftly.

He is startled again! For the first time this morning he observes that the paper weight on his table has been taken away. Looking more closely, he sees that the table has also been taken with it, and a different one sits here in its place. He glances upward. Where is his little cord, by which he has been able to cause this ceiling to fall and crush? And where are all the other springs, and keys, and knobs, and cords, that give him control of the life of any man standing or sitting in any portion of this apartment?

Not one of them remains! They have been removed!

Count St. Mart Golfi at once guesses that danger is near him, and that some climax is to be precipitated. And he also connects his danger in his mind with this strange man, who now walks swiftly into the room and stands before him with that same strange, baffling, impenetrable smile on his face.

"Count St. Mart Golfi, I greet you," says Waters, bowing. "I have again come to perform a duty. I learn that you have already given the red order. You have broken your word."

"What word?"

He is still the powerful leader of his League, and a man whom nothing daunts. He faces Waters, watching carefully for whatever may come.

"You agreed that before you gave the order, I should have due notice. Now it has been given without notice. This is the first time I remember to have discovered you in a breach of your promises."

"You speak as if I owed you an apology. It is not so. It is I, and not you, who command here. Perhaps you have forgotten that. I pray you, moderate your tone. You are quite too imperative."

"It is nothing. Neither of us is any longer entitled to command. Certainly not you. The red order has absolved me. I do not intend to be killed—not

yet. Count Golfi, it is time I confessed that which you have wished me to deny. I have decided to have nothing more to do with the League. I have notified the authorities where the Russians who belong to the plot of assassination may be found. If your men remain here they will be arrested before night. As a partial atonement for what I have done, I now come to give you the opportunity to escape. I merely desire to disarm your power in America and drive you back to Russia. I do not desire your death. If you go quickly, you will escape. If you do not, you will again feel the knout in the prisons of Siberia."

"Ah! You speak seriously, I see. You are then a greater traitor than I believed."

"I have never adopted your infamous creed of Nihilism. I am a patriot, but I do not write my creed in blood. I have believed, and I do still believe, that the wrongs of Russia's oppressed children can be made right. I have burned at them, and I have joined myself with the enemies of the Czar. But I do not believe in the dagger, the torch, and the bomb. Willing to die myself, I have never engaged in taking human life, save in self-defense. But when you, and those with you, have tried to wreak the spite of a private vengeance that never helps a righteous cause and does but degrade manhood, I—I, Count Golfi, have prevented you. I have done it skillfully, have I not? Be you the witness. I have saved life, you have destroyed life. Your record book has shown you how many I have rescued. And in doing it I have never betrayed my brothers. But the day has come when the patriots who love Russia and believe that there is nothing without liberty, clearly see that this League pursues methods of assassination which justice never has required. I therefore have undertaken to break up this League and to drive you and the men who work with you out of New York. I offer you the opportunity to escape arrest. Meanwhile, I will tell you that I am not alone."

"'Traitor!'" hisses Golfi, now becoming maddened by the cool audacity of Waters. "You have undertaken a large contract. When I leave New York I will

leave behind me the tortured carcass of the scoundrel who betrays liberty. The red order was not too soon. I will execute it myself."

He rises from his seat, his face blackening with a deadly scowl.

"That is what I would hear you say. If I have desired to shed blood at all, I have desired to shed the blood of Golfi. I will now tell you why. When I was a lad twelve years of age, my father belonged to the Moscow League, though he was an American. He was seized one day by the Czar's officers. He and another man were carried to an underground cell in St. Petersburg. There in that cell they were put to the torture. My father's family, his wife, my mother, myself, and my brother, younger than I, were imprisoned with them. To force confession of the conspiracy in which they were engaged they were put to the torture in the sight of us, his distracted family. But my mother, racked by his tortures, adjured him to constancy, and his lips never opened. But there was another. He had no family. No one loved him. Nevertheless, with the first shriek of his pain, he weakened and charged my father with the plot. Is that a familiar story, Count Golfi?"

St. Mart is staring in amazement at Waters. He draws away a little, saying, in a hoarse voice:

"Are you, then, that American's son?"

"Yes. It was your weakness, Count Golfi, and your lies, that sent my father to the knout. He died under that torture, and his body was thrown into the vaults beneath the palace prison. I have known this all these years. But my creed has never been the creed of the avenger, and you have lived. You, Count Golfi, since that day, by the justice of God, have felt the knout yourself. I am satisfied."

"But I am not satisfied. The American, your father, whose name until this hour I never knew, deserved his fate. His son shall fare far worse."

"You waste time. I have remembered the knout that slew my father. I have never loved the oppressors of Russia. But I detest your creed of blood, Count Golfi, and because I do I have not even been

willing to see you go again to the knout without warning. Take my advice and flee."

The smile is gone now, and he stands in the calm, cold, simple dignity of a man who has suffered and become strong in the fires, looking his enemy fearlessly in the face.

"When I have seen you torn limb from limb, and your last breath agonized from your carcass—then I will go—or stay, as I deem best. Baron de Lani!"

"Baron de Lani will not hear you. We are alone. I have taken away the table, you observe, and all your death traps are useless. But since you choose not to take my advice, I offer you an honorable death. Bring swords, Count Golfi. Both of us will not go out alive."

"Swords! What! Let an avowed traitor die by the sword? Never! Stand aside!"

He would have brushed past Waters to call in his men and execute his purpose. But now this iron man found out what is meant by iron against steel. His boast that he made to De Lani comes back upon him. He who would have crushed, is seized like lightning, and hurled back into his chair again. Over him flaming eyes! Before him that fine, tall, towering form! Twice he struggles up and twice he is hurled back!

"I am your master, Count Golfi," says this marvelous man, not even panting with his exertions.

"But I believe," he goes on, calmly, "that you are called the expert swordsman of all Moscow—of all Russia, it may be. I offer you a sword."

He goes straight and rapidly to the wall, where he has seen swords hanging. He has noted them here before. Before Count Golfi, astonished at the ease with which he has been flung about by this marvelous power, and sitting dazed in his chair, can recover himself, Waters has drawn these two blades from their sheaths, which are fastened in the rack, and stands again before the Count.

"With one of these in your hand, Count Golfi, you ought not to fear me," says Waters, tauntingly. "It is not often said that Golfi is a coward."

"Devil! I see you are a brave man, though, and

worth my steel. No man ever before threw me in a chair like this. But no man calls Golfi a coward. You shall eat the words and die. Come. You shall live but one minute by the clock."

Golfi is astonished that a man like Waters should propose to put himself into the jaws of death like this. He might be strong in his arms, but what is a little strength against a skill that has made him the most famous fencer in a nation of sword wielders? Waters is an American. He has not been known as a swordsman. It is sheer suicide for him to face Golfi—so the latter reasons.

But Waters steps to the center of the room and rests the point of his weapon on the floor, leaving its mate on the table.

"You have chosen the weaker blade. I shall break it," says Golfi, with a sneer, as he picks up the weapon Waters has left with him, and looks it over.

"If you do, then I shall kill you with the hilt," says Waters, smiling back his defiance.

Golfi gives a hard, strained laugh. Somehow he feels the shivering conviction in the presence of this powerful soul that he will literally keep his word. For the first time in his life Count Golfi, with a sword in his hand, feels little like wielding it. Those terrible glittering eyes are like a million swords, to pierce him with their kindling light of anger. For John Waters is being now slowly transformed. The smile is changing into the grim, resolute expression of dangerous eagerness, and his eyes begin to kindle like the fires of a lighting conflagration. His presence becomes terrible. The harsh, audacious Golfi, who seldom feels human influences, feels now the influence of John Waters. It seems almost to him, as he takes the sword from the table, that the heavy blade turns heavier in his grasp, and the strength oozes out of his muscles.

But he is a brave man without a sword. With a sword he is not only a brave man, but an invincible one before any ordinary antagonist. The consciousness of his power brings back his iron courage, when he fairly feels the hilt in his fingers. He shakes off

the strange sensation in his heart, which his look at Waters has induced, and says, in a colder tone:

"Before you die, Waters, let me tell you something to make your last thoughts pleasant. The hiding-place of Alvaroff, the traitor, has again been discovered. Before the day is gone they will be in my power. If you doubt it, then I will prove what I say. They are on a little strip of sand off the Rhode Island shore, in a deserted hunting box. Martin and some others are with them. They will be seized to-day—they will die to-morrow."

Waters starts visibly, and shuts his teeth together.

He remains a moment silent in his amazement and chagrin at this statement, which he knows must be the truth. Then he says, quietly:

"I am glad to be told. I shall take less time in killing you, therefore, in order that I may also save them. On guard!"

Waters lifts the point of his sword from the carpet and the two blades smite each other like the impact of brazen hammers.

Count St. Mart Golfi has not stood before his cool antagonist a half dozen seconds before he knows that his task of killing him will be not the play of an amateur. He sees at once that Waters is trying his blade with the care, skill, and precision of a practiced master of fence. And while doing it he at the same time holds at bay the skilled swordsman of Moscow as easily as one keeps a feather out of his face. True, Count Golfi is but little more than feinting as yet to test Waters's temper and craft, still he is amazed to find every action of his blade met like lightning and parried as if there were a wall of steel about this straight, supple figure, standing before him. He is trying the blade. Then suddenly, he pricks through the Count's coat.

It might well have been a fatal prick if it had been pressed, and if it had met nothing harder than the coat and the flesh. But the next moment Count Golfi knew that his defense had been discovered. Waters never from that moment pointed his blade at the body of the Count. That which he had believed, now he knows. Under the Count's coat is another coat,

through which the keenest and hardest steel blade in the world could not go—a shirt of linked steel of a mesh so fine and a temper so flexible that it might almost have been made of silk, but which would turn the keenest point ever aimed at the heart of man.

Waters only smiles in his calm, fearless way, but from that moment strikes the Count no more below the throat.

And even Waters will not find it so easy, it would seem, to strike above the throat. But he knows what he will do. He is willing to show the Count some things about the sword before he kills him. And so, after passing and beating on the iron defense which the Count interposes for a few seconds, Waters suddenly becomes a devil in a steel circle of flashing madness. It was as if heaven's lightnings, barbed and terrific, were whirling in the air all around Golfi's head. He meets the dreadful storm with an almost equal rapidity of parry and feint, until the clash of the blades is a continuous clamor, sounding like the roll and clatter of brazen drums, until his soul begins to tremble. He can stop that storm beyond his throat for a few minutes perhaps, but what living man could long maintain that tempest of motion and assault?

With all his wondrous power, the Russian strikes back, or meets with counter stroke of defense the whirling phantom of steel that beats and crashes and glitters, raining bolts of deadly wrath upon his sword. He grows cool and careful in his rapid defense, while the blazing face of the man who is slowly breaking him down becomes the dreadful face of an avenger. Count Golfi turns the edge of his blade to the fierce strokes. They will grow hard enough, so that his sword will cut Waters's sword in two, he hopes. But Waters seems to remember nothing now. There is no cool reserve any longer—only flames and terrors that leap out in his fiery eyes, and glow like sullen embers in his cheeks. He beats the Count all around the room. He follows with a tread as steady and merciless as the footsteps of doom. And ever around Golfi's head the flaming sword! Clash! Crash! Crash! Clash! Whirr! Smite! Bang! Clang! Whang! The

Count breathes heavily, while a little sardonic laugh issues from the lips of Waters. Three times has his blade touched the throat of Golfi, and blood is streaming down his clothing. It will take but a little more of this to kill. There is a desperate look creeping into the Count's eyes. If he does not rally and beat back this incarnate hurricane that sweeps him back and drives him around the room, and deafens his ears with the clangor of the swords, he will soon go down before it and die. He knows this, and summons his mighty powers for an escape from death—at least for a desperate resistance. The Count, in a corner, retreats no more. He strikes back with the energy of a devil in despair. He increases the tension of his weary spirit and of his powerful muscles. And there for two minutes, foot to foot, hand to hand, sword upon sword, those giants of a modern day smite back and forth in deadly crashings of fierce encounter that is like the artillery of heaven cracking in a brazen chamber. Then all at once that which the Count had hoped for and Waters had feared, happens. The Count, striking with the edge of his blade again and again near the same part of Waters's sword, breaks it half way to the hilt.

"Now die," shrieks the panting Golfi, as the broken blade falls on the carpet.

But he does not know his man yet.

With a whole sword Waters had been a hurricane. With a broken sword he becomes an avalanche. The Count's blow, aimed to point his words, falls upon the vacant air. Waters is not there. He is everywhere else, however. That broken, ragged blade, striking like an earthquake upon the Count's, and where there had been but one broken sword now there are two. But the Count has no time to note that he still has in his hand the longer weapon. He only sees a flash. Then there is gushing of his blood, a groan half uttered, a hurling back of his great bulk, and the career of Count St. Mart Golfi is forever terminated. Waters flings down his broken blade and stands upright and still for a moment, then stoops and bends over the Count, and would speak, but instantly sees that Golfi will never hear again. The fierce eyes are already glazing in death.

Waters rises and passes out, going down into an apartment where De Lani is sitting, quietly reading a book. De Lani has been here all through that terrific combat of the swords. Now and then he has heard the clash of the conflict faintly sounded down through the closed doors. He knows that the master of his fate and of all their fortunes has entered the house. Waters has warned a dozen of the Nihilists to flee, and to give the word forth that the den is to be raided at eight in the evening. And with all their allegiance to Count Golfi, before the supreme personality that for days has been warping these men under the power of his will, these men are now more for Waters than they are for Golfi. They have not obeyed the red order. They have merely pretended that they will obey it. It has been whispered about that Golfi is jealous of the greater man, and that the greater man ought to be their leader. Nevertheless, they have intended to obey Golfi until Waters shows himself the better man. They know, some of them now, that Waters aspires to supplant Golfi, and that Waters will make a fight for the supremacy. The majority, however, are still for Golfi, and hope that he will rescind the red order and merely send Waters back to Russia.

But when Waters warns them that the retreat has been discovered, and that the assassination of the Czar will bring matters to a climax with the New York branch of the League, they know that a man has spoken who never speaks trifles. And he has ordered them to scatter and to meet, when again they meet, in Moscow.

Those who would not have obeyed him as a leader know better than to slight his warnings as a patriot. And so Waters, when he came to this place, had found a state of things of which Count Golfi was utterly ignorant. The Nihilists who have been warned are ready to flee. Those who have not, speedily hear the news. And now, when John Waters finds De Lani sitting below, he is not surprised to hear that the house has been deserted while the sword combat was going on. It is six o'clock. He has ordered De Lani to be here. He has coolly announced to De Lani that he

is going to meet Count Golfi, and induce him to rescind the red order. De Lani knows what this means. He knows that they will not both come from the chamber alive. And he believes that Waters's face has been seen here for the last time, because he believes in the invincible prowess of Count Golfi.

But when Waters, cool, smiling, and quiet, stands before him like an unruffled summer day, he represses his astonishment, and rises to his feet to hear what he will say.

"Baron, the red order has been rescinded. I advise you now to make a journey to Russia. There is time, Baron."

De Lani bows.

"Count Golfi will perhaps accompany me. Do you go, too?"

"The Count will not go. The Count will go nowhere. The Count is dead. It was his life or mine. I have reason yet to live for a little while. Let us not regret. Let me tell you, Baron, that I believe, if Golfi had chosen for himself, he would have chosen to die with a sword in his hand, in a conflict, foot to foot with another man also with a sword in his hand. I have gratified that choice. He is the first man I have ever killed in single combat. Baron, before he died he told me that detectives had been sent on the track of Alvaroff. Is it so?"

"I may as well tell you—if the Count is dead. Fer-rand Merki and ten picked men are on the way. Their hiding-place was discovered yesterday."

"How many men are left here, Baron?"

"Not one. Think you they desire to risk a journey to Siberia?"

"Then I must work alone. Baron, how soon can you leave this house?"

"In five minutes."

"Good! Remain here until I return."

Waters goes out abruptly. He makes his way down flights of stairs, through closed and secret passageways to the underground cellar of this house. Here at last, with keys which he carries, he unlocks a damp cellar room, into which he goes, carrying with him a lamp

which he secured on the way down. It is Golfi's torture room. Here are a dozen devilish devices, brought from Russia, which have been used in this modern city by the Nihilist chief upon the flesh of men who had been made the victims of this League, or who became the objects of its condemnation, or who, before they died, were here put to the tests of pain in order to wring from them those secrets and confessions that were thought important to the welfare of Golfi and his associates. Strange, indeed, that these men who have fled from the cruelties of a medieval tyranny perpetuated into the nineteenth century, should wish to employ its devilish instruments themselves! Such is human nature!

Waters proceeds to detach from the ceiling of this room a common instrument of torture called thumb-screws. These alone, with the hook and cords by which they had been fastened to the ceiling, he takes down, and places them in a small bag which he has taken with him to this place. Then he shuts together his white teeth and goes out. He examines some mechanism outside in the main cellar room of this basement. There are some cases in the middle of this chamber, and he knows what they contain. Wires proceed from these cases to the mechanism in the corner. Other wires run from the mechanism up through the floors above. Waters satisfies himself that his dynamite contrivance is in working order, and then climbs again the stairs, and suddenly stands before Baron de Lani, still reading his book.

"Baron, I am now about to set the clock. If you are ready to leave, go at once."

The Baron makes no reply, rises, and leaves the room.

Waters goes to the clock. It is stopped. He sets the hands at fifteen minutes past six. By his watch it is ten minutes past six. Then he adjusts the little alarm pointer upon the mark that indicates twenty minutes past six.

It is fifteen minutes past six. He touches the pendulum. The clock ticks. He thinks a moment, and then, with a smile of joy on his face, he goes down and locks the door of the deserted house behind him.

At twenty minutes past six a policeman on the beat near this building hears a woman scream, and feels the shock of a terrific explosion. Alarms are turned in, and as flames leap from the ruins a man standing on the other side of Jane Street, with a little bag in his hand, walks away slowly, saying under his breath:

"It is the cremation ceremony of Count St. Mart Golfi."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"GOOD EVENING, MR. VANDERVEER."

At ten Vanderveer was to go out.

At eight he gets a great surprise.

It is the same night upon which Count Golfi has his last sword practice with a better man.

There is a jail attendant who has been pointed out to Vanderveer as the man who will open the door for him at ten.

But he is disturbed at six, when the guard is changed, to see that the man who is to release him is not in his usual place. Instead, there is another, a strange face, that Vanderveer has not seen before. He fears that there has been discovery, or a slip, or some miscarriage of the plan. He is not a happy man. He almost feels that to go out is, after all, but little better than to stay here. If he goes out, it is to remember forever a face that he would fain forget, and to curse forever the man who had promised to be a friend and whom Vanderveer now believes to be the cause of all his misery. As the time draws near, therefore, Vanderveer is uneasy and half sick of his situation. Blanche is beautiful, and sweet, and noble—but he knows, whenever that other face floats into his vision, that he does not love Blanche—that he never will love her as he has loved and still loves the phantom that floats before him whenever he stops his mad thinking long enough to admit it. But he is grim and bitter now, and while inwardly cursing the strange fate that leaves him here the sport of circumstances, to choose

between the chance of disgrace and death, and the smiles and embraces of a woman whom he can never love half enough to repay her great sacrifice, he prepares to make the choice and take the consequences. She loves him—and it is the only poor return he can make for her brave and forgiving assistance.

This is the way Vanderveer looks at it at eight o'clock.

At this hour the new guard alone is left in sight in the jail corridors. Vanderveer thinks that whatever occurs will occur within two hours. He is waiting for ten o'clock. At eight o'clock this new guard, first looking all about him to be sure that he is not observed, stops at Vanderveer's cell and thrusts a little paper through, dropping it inside.

Vanderveer at once surmises that the release will be effected by this man instead of the other, for some reason unknown to him. He picks up the note.

As he reads it his soul flames like a volcano.

The faint, fine odor of a perfume lingers in it. The first part is in a writing that he knows, as he knows the music of her voice, or the light of her eyes, and it reads thus:

“Dearest:—He will release you. Follow him implicitly. Let us both love the noblest man in the world—save one. Do as he bids you. My arms wait for you, my heart is aching for you, my soul will flee with you. Come quickly. He will guide you. Come.”

His brain reels.

From her!

From the being of beings, whom he worshiped more than his God!

And he has dared to doubt her. He has dared to think her false.

How he swept away, in a flash of revelation borne by that letter to his understanding, all his miserable fog of misery and skepticism. She is true. She still loves him. She has not gone away with Waters. She has not forgotten him in his peril and desolate situation. She loves him.

And Waters!

He turns to the other part of his note. It is in a fine hand, too, but different:

"The above will guide you. Be ready to go out at nine to-night. Ansel, the guard, is my man. Trust him freely."

This was signed "J. W."

Vanderveer threw himself on his couch in a reaction of mingled remorse and delight. "J. W." That meant that he has wickedly wronged again a man who is risking life for him and for her. And she has said, "Let us both love him."

He can not recover from his abasement. He groans aloud. He feels as if the earth ought to open and swallow him up. He has been a coward, an inconstant imbecile. So he calls himself. And he kisses this little note, and the tears flow over it as he lies in his self-abasement and recalls his black and wicked doubts. Then he shakes himself and swings his arms about, and remembers that all that blackness is forever gone.

But Blanche! He thinks of her, too. He thinks how again he has sharpened a sting for her patient heart. He pities her now, and shrinks from the blow he will drive against her pride and her love.

For an hour this man, still distracted and excited, walks his cell. He thinks joyfully, then sadly, then remorsefully, then penitently and pityingly. He thinks of Blanche, then of Brauna, then of John Waters. But he comes on the whole to a mood of joy through it all. He is to be free, he is to flee to her arms, he is to leave the shadows behind.

The clock strikes nine!

The new guard again looks through all the corridors. There is another guard sleeping at the door. He has been drugged. Ansel comes to Vanderveer's cell, puts his fingers to his lips, and says, softly:

"Now."

Then he opens the door of the cell.

The two figures creep to the outer gates of iron.

Two guards on the way, drugged and dead asleep, they pass safely.

A minute, and they are in the open air. Ansel leaves the keys in the locks as he passes through the doors and gates. They glide to a near corner. A carriage is there, and Ansel signals the driver, and calls to him in a foreign tongue—the Slavic language of Russia:

“There is nothing without Liberty.”

He opens the carriage door and Vanderveer enters, followed by the guard.

And as the carriage rolls away a voice in the shadows of the carriage says quietly:

“Good evening, Mr. Vanderveer. I congratulate you on the occasion.”

He reaches out his hand in the darkness, and though these two men can not see, a thrill of final understanding passes between them with the clasping of their hands.

“John Waters—it was God’s will to make you a man. I can never repay your deeds. The world has nothing worthy of you.”

At eight o’clock Vanderveer received the letter.

At nine o’clock Blanche is waiting, cloaked, in her apartments.

She and François have returned to New York since the trial. They have believed that there was a plot to release the prisoner, but François has not penetrated it. The nearest he has come to it is to hear Pierre say that he believes that man Waters is the power behind it all.

And Blanche has kept from François everything. She has again made ready her web to enmesh the strangler. At ten she will leave the city, Vanderveer with her. At eleven Ruel’s men will take the strangler.

In the carriage outside now is Pierre. She has been true to him, and he to her. Together they have schemed, together they will flee.

Blanche has told François that she will move heaven and earth to save Vanderveer when the trial comes, and that then, if he escapes, she will still pursue the plot they together have concocted. She even lets him

know that she is visiting the jail. But she does not tell him of the contemplated escape. This she conceals. She means to make that the occasion of breaking forever with the strangler. So she has sent already that very day to a certain French restaurant, where, she has learned through Godby the lieutenant of Ruel lunches daily, a little letter, and that afternoon she has followed her note in person. She is not recognized. This emboldens her. She announces her identity to M. Picard, the lieutenant. He laughs at her, and remarks that he believes her lying. Then in less than half an hour she has made her bargain. Ruel will not be pleased with her alone. M. Picard has not the least objection to trading Dodo for the strangler.

But if he hopes to get an advantage and betray her he has not understood, with all that he has heard of this woman in Paris, what she can do as an antagonist in cunning and the arts of escape.

She has left with the detectives a messenger, who, at ten o'clock will lead him about the city in an aimless search, and bring up at the apartments of François, where she makes it sure he will be by arranging to be there herself on an appointment. François shall say that she is coming on an important matter, and he will await her there.

Thus is everything prepared.

But at nine o'clock, while she waits in her cloak within, and Pierre in the carriage outside, she hears the bell ring.

It is not François's ring. She knows that, and this eases her mind. She has feared he may not be seized. She has feared he may turn the tables somehow at the last moment. Pierre has feared the same, and he means to watch everything.

But in a moment there is a step on the stairs and a man is shown into the parlors. It is the guard that was to release Vanderveer.

"What now? Speak!" cries Blanche, catching her breath.

"I have been laid off for the night. There is something strange on foot."

"Laid off! We have been discovered, then?"

"I know not. If we had, why should I not have been put under arrest? But it is strange, madam. I hope you will pay me my money, all the same."

"A pest on your money. I do not understand it. Tell me all there is to tell," she commands.

"There is a new man in my place. I have never seen him about before. I thought you might have sent him yourself."

Blanche stares at him, her face like marble. Is she defeated again? And, as before, defeated with the cup even at her lips?

She says little more to the man. Counting out some money, she gives it to him, dismissing him at the same time with directions when to come again, and then sends for Pierre, who comes at once, and is even more startled than Blanche had been at the news she tells him.

"It is that man Waters," he cries, with an oath. "They are going to get him out. There is yet time, perhaps. I will go and give the alarm to the sergeant. Meanwhile—François?"

"Let that be. We will take care that M. Picard does not find us. If he breaks his word and looks for us we will not be here. Let François be seized. But do as you have said. Prevent everything! If she gets him out, that is the end. Pierre, as you love me, now for God's sake act quickly."

She has lost her poise entirely. She looks haggard to Pierre, as she stands under the light and thus implores him. Her resolution is great, but this second fatal interruption has weakened her. She has one weak place! She is a fatalist, and she now begins to fear that fate has been turned against her. But she will die fighting. She has lead at her heart, but she will not abandon her plot until she is ready to abandon life. She is still marvelous and decisive in her intellect.

"As for me, I am going to François. I will assure myself that he is there. Meet me again at twelve, here. Learn everything and report. If you succeed in alarming the police, all well. But in any event, come back here by twelve."

François, since his return, had thought it best to change his apartments. He knows that Ruel's men are on the alert. He does not greatly resemble the strangler whom they seek, but the danger of being recognized has induced him nevertheless to seek quieter quarters. He had made an acquaintance in New York in the person of a French bookseller, who has a large stall in Bond Street, and lives in apartments over his store. Of him François has rented some rooms. Here he sits this same night, at half-past nine, waiting for Blanche to come. He does not know what important thing she has to tell. She has written him that she will be here about ten with great news.

At half-past nine she comes.

But before that hour François has learned that at ten she will betray him into the hands of M. Ruel.

CHAPTER XXX.

“I WILL SHOW YOU THE CORD, THEN.”

“Ah, my love, you are prompt as ever,” he says, gayly, as Blanche glides in upon him. “And you are quite a little weary, too, I see. Look out for the roses in your cheeks, beautiful Dodo. They have earned us a fortune. And you promised once on your honor that they should not fade until you are as old as a grandmother. What has made them pale, I wonder?”

The woman laughs, seating herself familiarly on a cushioned settee.

“It is my disappointment, of course. Did I not tell you how I adore Vanderveer? And I have been through a good deal, have I not? But I keep my promise. It is not enough to destroy the roses. I shall bloom again fresher than ever after I get him out of jail.”

“And how comes on the matter, pray? You have talked with the lawyers?”

"It will be easy to get him off on the murder charge—that everybody knows. But that odious, stupid Knowlton will send him to Sing Sing. If they do not clear him, then I have a plan to get him off some other way. We want the money, do we not?"

"Who can say? We thought so—but I have been feeling of late that it would be much better for you to be poor."

"In order that I might want the money more—that is what you would say?"

"No! In order that I might regulate you with greater ease, Dodo, my pet."

"Ha, ha! So you are ready to confess that I am a trifle independent and irrepressible, are you? Good! It is the very point to which I wish to bring you. Ah, François, who would have a master? Not I, believe me."

She flashes her blue eyes at him piquantly, and fails to understand the faint undertone of threat in all his manner.

"A master! Well, if you have but one it is very well. It is the other to whom I should like to object."

"The other? But I have none at all. Yet it is delicious to know how jealous you can be. I really would like to have Vanderveer for a master. He is a god, don't you know—not a mere mortal. But it isn't expedient, so I will have no master at all. Why should I?"

"Because you need regulating. I think so more and more."

"I admit it. But what a lot for the man who attempts it! Why, he would be better situated in hell."

The daring creature laughs again, and tosses her head in a scoff of conceit.

"Oh, that goes without saying. Still, I am inclined to break off the Vanderveer affair. It wearies me."

"That is because you do not appreciate my infatuation. You merely think it is the sordid cash I work for. But it is not. It is the man himself."

"What will you do with him, then, when you get him?"

"Oh, I divide fair. If I feel like it, I may propose a

compromise with the strangler. I will say to him thus: François, I like the god and the god likes me. Take all the money your conscience will let you and leave me the god. In a year, if the god is too saintly, and tires me, I will come back for more adventures. What would the strangler say?"

She was merely passing the time. She believes that about eleven o'clock the strangler will end his career. And she is willing to entertain him here until it is certain that he will not go out that night.

"Oh, I was about to suggest the same thing—I have been about to suggest it a dozen times, Dodo, dear. I have little fear that you will be able to stay away from me a six-month. It is the money I want. If you have half the fancy I suspect you of for this American dude, it is a good riddance—of course."

He laughs in a strained way that causes Blanche to look at him fixedly. She feels, in spite of her nerve, a little creeping of fear at his manner. He is too quiet. He is making an effort to be quiet. He has something under his exterior that puts her on guard more and more.

"It is not the first time we have been agreed, then, dear. But when the time really comes you will rave and pull your hair and beg and entreat me not to go. I know you, jealous François!"

"Bah! And you really think yourself indispensable to me, then? It is a mere fancy. Ah, Dodo, we have been a remarkable pair together, have we not? Truly we ought to be indispensable to each other. Never will such a pair come together again while the ages run. And do you know that of late I have had bad dreams. I have dreamed again and again that I resumed the life of the strangler in the Rue Navarin. And ever I was strangling——"

He pauses, with a soft little glitter in his eyes, and looks at Blanche. She did not make any outward sign, but in her heart she felt a chill as the chill of a dungeon. She only laughs, however, and purposely perverting his sentence, she finished it without a quaver of the voice.

"Yes. That you were strangling the god. Pshaw!

Have you not learned that dreams go by contraries? He will live to walk over both our graves. But don't be so ghastly with your bad dreams. Dream something good. Dream of me. There is not a sweeter dream, I am sure."

As she talks, quite imperceptibly this woman, now on guard with all the tense alertness of her nerves, steals her hand into the folds of her dress until it rests upon the hilt of her little poisoned dagger. She is aroused by the sly, quiet manner of the man before her. She feels certain that there is somewhere a danger. But she talks on, and laughs at him, and flings her sparkling glances at him as if she were as much at ease as a bird in a tree, while he is studying the situation and planning his deadly work.

"It is because I dream of you that I am so moody nowadays. It is only the other night I saw you in my dream again at the house of the Minister of Justice, and you had in your hand the cord that Boutilliere, the inkmaker's apprentice, once attempted to use when I prevented him. I dreamed that you——"

"Bah! A fig for dreams! You should have dreamed that I put it around the neck of the Minister of Justice. Dreams are follies. Your digestion is irregular, I am certain. Let the cord be forgotten."

"Forgotten, Dodo? Never! It is too delightful. What! forget the foundation of all my fortune? If I had not been a strangler then I never should have found you, and if I had not found you——"

"Then you would never have succeeded. Certainly not."

"Certainly not. But I was telling you the dream."

"Don't then. Remember the cord if you like. You are very fond of recalling Boutilliere and the cord. But we left all that behind in Paris. I wrote you I had an important piece of news, *mon cher*—and you do not even remember to be curious. Guess, now, what it is?"

"Bah! You think it was left in Paris. It is a mistake. I will tell you where the cord is, then I will hear your news. Very well. It is now in my pocket."

"*Parbleu!* What shocking taste, François. Keep

it there, then. You like to astonish me—and I am not astonished—I am merely disgusted. Your inventions are cheap. I could tell you a fiction much more plausible than that.”

François looks at her with an increasing threat in his eyes. Unconsciously to herself she has begun to betray her consciousness that he is threatening her, in her tone of defiance.

“Fiction? I will show you the cord, then,” says François, with a smile that makes her blood chill.

“Pray show nothing. You see I have penetrated your miserable fiction. It is like you, Monsieur d’Avigne. You were always studying effects. It doesn’t really pay. I am a dramatist myself, and I see through the tricks of the art. If you have a cord it was made in New York yesterday, and you bring it here to strike me with gratitude for that old favor. But I am as callous as stone. It served you more than me. It is quits. Do not remind me of Boutilliere again. He was guillotined.”

“Ah, fearless Dodo! You are as delightful now as on that night when you did not even turn pale as Boutilliere took the cord from its hook. I even believe if you had been strangled you would never have flinched.”

She is smiling no more now. She knows what all this talk has meant. He sees that she is afraid, but he does not yet know how accurate are her intuitions. She knows what that cord means that François has in his pocket. She knows that he has somehow discovered her treachery. She knows that the climax is coming. She knows that this vindictive and terrible strangler will kill her if he can before she leaves this room. And she means not to be killed. She means rather to kill.

But now, knowing herself to be face to face with a crisis, all her fear goes away. She is as watchful as a cat. She is half hoping the struggle will come very soon. She is half resolved to make assurance sure by striking the first blow. She keeps her brain active looking for a good opening. Nothing could more certainly assure her that François means her de-

struction than his words and manner. She wonders how he has discovered her treachery. She does not know that every motion of M. Ruel for weeks has been reported three times a day to François. She does not know that no one can talk to M. Ruel or enter his presence without François's knowledge. She knows still less that when she visited the Frenchman in disguise, before a half hour had passed François knew the very words of her interview.

"Let us change the subject, then," he remarks, nonchalantly. "You have some news. I am very curious—notwithstanding your accusation to the contrary."

"Oh, I have decided not to tell it now. I am offended at your indifference. I will tantalize you until you come over to see me to-morrow."

She has assumed an easier air, and François is a little deceived. He supposes that she is off her guard again, and that his cunning has removed her fear. He therefore pretends to become gay and affable and laughs, showing his white teeth agleam under his mustache.

"Do as you like," he says, rising from his chair, carelessly. "I thought it was merely an excuse to make me a call. Did I not say that you are unable to keep away from me? As to your news—if it keeps until to-morrow you may have something better still to say."

He goes to a window, pretending to look out into the dimly-lighted street.

With his back to her, however, he reaches his hand into his pocket and draws forth Boutilliere's cord. It is a small, red, silken cord—small enough to be enclosed in his clasped hand nearly without showing.

But she is not deceived. She knows, when he rises and goes to the window that in the mood which his soft, glittering eyes have betrayed, he is making a preparation. When he turns his back with his hand out of her sight she knows as well as if she saw it that he is preparing.

But she sits as if musing on a sweet thought, and says softly to him:

"You have an elegant tailor, Monsieur d'Avigne. Your coat fits as if it grew on you. I almost think you were born to be a gentleman."

She has spoken on her settee for a purpose. If François thinks he has for a victim a woman capable of being surprised, he is about to learn to his cost what sometimes follows a false supposition. She has spoken on the settee that he may be sure she has not changed her position. But the instant she has ceased speaking, she draws her skirts about her ankles so they do not rustle so much as the whisper of a blade of grass. She glides like a snake. She darts like a flash of sunshine. François is turning, expecting to see her on the settee. He is turning with his nerves all taut for his dreadful attempt. He turns, intending to sweep like a devilish beast of prey upon Dodo, and circle her white neck with his cord. He will then be revenged. He will then be rid of her. He will then repay her treachery.

But in his instant glance he sees she is not there. And he sees no more clearly from that instant. Before he can tell where she is he feels the quick pang of her dagger in his back. She strikes like a merciless assassin—twice, thrice, before his quick instinct of defense has enabled him, active as a tiger, to turn and seize her hand. It is her left hand, not the dagger hand. With a savage stroke her little dagger falls on his hand, grasping hers, and forces him to release it, while he gives a bellow of pain. But after that there is no sound from either, save the fierce panting of the breath.

The strangler knows in an instant that he has not five minutes to live. He knows that upon the point of her dreadful dagger, and all along its sides, is enough poison to kill twenty men, though they had twice the vitality that runs in his frame. But his strength is not yet impaired. He will die, but dying, he has time to kill. He knows his mistake. He who was about to attack has been attacked, and by a woman who is as bloody and desperate as any fiend that ever vexed history. She is Dodo now, the same Dodo who did with him the dreadful deed of the Rue Navarin—

the Dodo who has as little compunction at stabbing him in his back as she would have had in pinning a fly to the wall.

But he stays her dagger by smiting her arm away. He would have seized her, but he could not. She knew too well the fate that awaited her if he should get her white throat in his fingers. Before he could move almost she is up the room, her poinard dripping with his blood in her hand, smiling at him now with the fixed, sardonic smile of a beautiful satyr.

“ You have Boutillierre’s cord in your hand. What is that for, I wonder? ”

François darts at her with all his agility. But she eludes him. Again he dashes after her. He is bleeding. He is about to die. He sees her in the corner of the chamber. He rallies all his powers to reach her.

François, in the dizzy agonies of the poison in his blood, fast turning it to water, retains his senses even while his eyes flash before him as if shot from their sockets, and converted into ray points of fire. He rushes at the set, ghastly, mocking face in the corner with the fierce energy of a madman, and so lightning-like is his sweep upon her that she can not elude him. She nearly succeeds, but the demon’s hand is on her shoulder, and then clutches her arm like the closing of iron jaws. She turns again and her dagger flashes about. But now return to this criminal all the horrid instincts of the strangler. He cares for the dagger no more. With all his powerful strength he holds her off, twists her form about, and then, as by a sudden practiced movement, the little red cord goes over her head. She knows it. She sweeps up her hands to prevent it from tightening. Too late! Already it is about her white throat. She leaps at him while she can, like a tigress. He has released her while he wields the cord, for he believes the cord will be enough. Like a desperate animal she flings herself at François, and smites him again with her dagger. He merely tightens the cord, and then whirls her away again, and turns her about so that she can strike him no more. She chokes and knows that he has left yet strength to kill! Her frenzied hands clutch at Bou-

tilliere's cord. It will not even give room for a finger to intervene. François, with all the devilish instinct of his former craft, is tightening and tightening and tightening the horrible instrument of death. The fiery sparkles are leaping in her vision. Silent and inexorable the strangler holds her, writhing, twisting, choking in the unutterable pangs of strangulation. She sways about. She strains to tear herself away from that deadly clutch that binds her throat and will not let her desperate breath issue. Her breast heaves in the terrific and vain labor of vital agitations. Darkness with sparkling flashes, and dull, horrid rumbling noises in her ears begin to rob her of sense. Her struggle is no longer with intelligence, but merely the awful protest of her enduring physical nature raging against destruction. François knows, even though himself ready to die, the signs of this weakening struggle. He becomes savage in his unspeakable dying madness. He twists the cord and growls like a beast in his lair. Then the end comes.

There is one last desperate writhing, a shuddering of that sensuous body, and with another insane growl the strangler, feeling her limp and unresisting, and sinking in dissolution, flings her body down on the carpet, where a blackened and ghastly face turns up to meet his eyes that can no longer distinguish it nor see the face of the dead. He, too, is dying. The poison of the dagger is rioting in the scorching fevers of his blood, that is also flowing from twenty wounds and covering him like a crimson horror. He reels about. He seeks to reach the air. He staggers to a window and succeeds with his weakening arms in flinging up the sash. He attempts to make an outcry. He wishes some one would come to save him. The madness of innumerable flashlights floats in his brain, the fires of untold agonies are shooting in his stiffening muscles. All objects merge into one lurid, flickering fog of mingled fire and darkness. He reels all about the chamber. He strikes objects and feels them not. Shapes begin to become as expanding and receding vistas of snaky horror stretching out into fathomless lengths and breadths. He tears off his collar and cra-

vat with fingers that rage to relieve that laboring breath. He sees the fires darkening and the sparkles become dull and fade into night. He falls, struggles up again, and staggers about some more. Will he never die? Yes. When God has made his end terrible enough. For at last the dim shade that reels all about his vision suddenly sweeps up at him from every side, and the floor smites him in the face. Then the final roar, the gasp of dissolution. And as he falls, he falls close beside Dodo. And when in the morning the French bookseller finds them, they lie here as they have lived—together, both blackened faces upstaring like a vision of the damned, dead upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“LET THIS MAN SEE HOW THEY DO IT IN ST. PETERSBURG.”

A little strip of sand.

Against it is the wash of the ocean. Behind it is a channel and the Rhode Island shore.

It has taken time for Merki to find it, and to make sure that the fugitives are there. And he knows by this time that they have help, and that it will be wise to work with proper caution.

Nevertheless Merki understands that it is well to make all possible haste. He is not sorry there is likely to be some resistance. He hopes that if there is, the excuse will be all the better for the assassination which he intends. He has men enough with him, he believes, to effect the capture or the death of Alvaroff and his daughter. And he understands that he is ordered to execute the red order that Golfi has issued against them.

He has waited only for night. Under cover of the shore he will then embark his men in their boats and sweep down on the strip of sand. Then let them look out. It is their last loop in a history of escapes.

And they are here! They have been made comfort-

able in the little shooting-box, which, in fact, belongs to Vanderveer. Martin and two more faithful men, who now obey only Waters, and who have forsaken the fortunes of Golfi, are with them. And Martin has discovered that there is danger. Going to the mainland that very afternoon he has seen signs of enemies. He has told all he knows to Alvaroff, and now they are watchful and alert. They have been informed that at any hour now Waters may be here to take them away. And just as night is setting in, Martin has seen the smoke of a steamer far down in the Sound, which he reports as being very possibly the steam yacht.

But when the night falls the moon comes out a dim crescent in the sky, and Martin posts a man at either end of the islet to make sure no one surprises them. One of these men, after a time watching toward the mainland, hears a sound of oars the other way, and, hastening across the sandbar, is overjoyed to find Waters himself and a half-dozen men, and with him Vanderveer. They hasten to the hut, the sentinel informing Waters on the way of Martin's suspicions.

"We are not too late, then, Vanderveer. Merki has been delayed some, it would seem. All is now well."

Vanderveer is silent and agitated. In a moment he will be in her presence.

Waters orders his men to various parts. Two are left to guard the boats, of which now they have three, all drawn up in the beach grass at convenient locations. Others are ordered to keep in the shadows and report to him at once the approach of any boat from the mainland side.

Then, with Vanderveer, he goes inside. The little cabin has two rooms. In the outer room Waters leaves Vanderveer, and after a moment gains admission to the other. Alvaroff and his daughter, seated together in silence, rise with joy in their faces, and welcomed him once more. When the greetings are over, Waters says, softly:

"I wish to drive you out now, Miss Alvaroff—shall I say Mrs. M——"

"No! I have never borne that name. Say Brauna, if you will, Mr. Waters. I feel as if our trials were

about to end. To you we owe all this. May God reward you."

"Say nothing about it. I have left somebody outside. Go!"

She understands. Her face grows as the radiance of a dawn in June. She sweeps out and stands before him. All the world at that moment was as vacant space, while love claimed its own.

Waters, on conferring with Martin, determines in his mind that there will be a demonstration before morning, and makes his preparations accordingly. He has force enough for a successful defense, but he has more than a defense in view.

The night wears on. About midnight Waters sees a black hulk far away on the ocean, which on studying he feels sure is his looked-for steam yacht, an elegant vessel, manned and provisioned for a voyage across the sea. He knows that according to their orders they would lie off and on until morning before exchanging signals. He reports her arrival to the fugitives, and assures them that they have but one night more of hardship in this place.

"And that is already more than half gone," he adds, with a smile.

But there are others who have seen the vessel in the offing. Ferrand Merki and his fellows, preparing to swoop in upon their prey, and having the impression that only a feeble force will be there to oppose them, have observed this yacht two or three miles from the shore. It is light enough to see her general build, and Merki believes at once that in her the fugitives will try that very night to escape him. As soon, therefore, as he can get ready his crew in two boats, they leave the shore and steal out across the channel toward the sandy islet.

Martin sees the boats almost as soon as they leave the shore. He reports them to Waters. Waters predicts that Merki will merely patrol the island with the boats to make sure they do not embark, and wait for daylight to attempt their capture. This in part proved to be the issue; in part it did not. Merki sent one of the boats with a party of his men skirting the

islet, around which they could row in twenty minutes, and landed with the remainder on the end of the sand strip. He knows he can not prevent being seen and makes no effort to conceal the approach of the boats.

But, seeing nothing living as he lands, he bids his men sit down in the beach grass and wait, while he reconnoiters a little on his own account.

Merki does not know that John Waters is on the sand strip. He has started out under commission by Golfi, and, spurred by his own desires, to make an end of this troublesome business that has plagued him so long. He has come to the conclusion that Golfi, or Golfi's men, are somehow very inefficient. Were it not so, he thinks, then those whom he wishes out of the world would long ago have died. Merki believes that the trial and acquittal in court was planned by the Alvaroffs themselves, with the aid of Vanderveer, the lover. But he sees clearly that his scheme of revenging himself upon Brauna and of possessing the fortune of her father has been cut off by that trial, and unless he now takes a desperate course his schemes will fail. He is entirely capable of a desperate course. He thinks this strip of sand is beyond the reach of any probable interference by the constituted authorities. He can strike here, can even shed blood and take human life, and none will ever bring him to judgment. The League, he thinks, is powerful to shield its agents, and though these fugitives have been cleared by the courts, there is no one interested in them who has the power to punish Merki, if he succeeds in his black purpose. Besides, this cunning wretch does not mean to leave any tracks. He will capture them, so he plans, and cause them to disappear. There will be no consequences.

He thinks he will make a little exploration of the sand strip and determine from his reconnoissance what course is the best in shaping his attack on the cabin. He is on the whole a measurably daring man, and feels no fear of anything he may chance to encounter. He takes it for granted that he has his intended victims cooped up here safely, and that he has only to seize them. He believes they will fear him, and the force

he brings, far more than he needs to fear them, even if they resist.

In this confidence he is less cautious than he might be, as he walks along inspecting the sand strip. He does not, therefore, see the crouching form of Waters in the shadow of the scrubby foliage as he passes by.

His first warning of danger is a hand of iron on his shoulder and the voice of Waters in his ears, commanding:

"Make a sound, and I will strangle you."

When Merki feels the hand on his shoulder, startled but resolute, he instantly calls loudly to his men. He calls but once. Before his breath is fairly out it is cut off by a hand on his throat, and like a child in the grasp of a giant, he is hurled violently to the earth. But with the agility of a cat, he is on his feet again, striving to wrench himself from that iron clutch, at the same time feeling for his knife or pistol. But with a few savage motions, Waters, grasping his arms, binds them, holding Merki's face in the sand while he does it, to cut off his cries. Then, jerking him to his feet, Waters stuffs a handkerchief in his mouth, and, with the assistance of Benonski, who has now come upon the scene, drags him to the cabin.

Meanwhile, Merki's single outcry has been heard by his men, and there is confusion among them. Waters and Benonski, pausing to look about before they go inside, can see their dark forms down by the end of the sand strip where they had landed.

"We have time, Benonski. Tell Martin to guard carefully. They will not get far if they try to come on here. In fifteen minutes more we will take the boats and try to reach the steamer. Then come in here. I may want you."

Martin is set on the alert with his men, and they crawl in the beach grass until they have formed a line quite across the sand strip, between the cabin and the end of the island where Merki's men are still seen.

Waters pushes the enraged and breathless Merki into the cabin. He has not yet been harmed much, though his neck is aching still with the hard clutch of those resistless fingers, and his mouth and eyes

are well filled with the sand into which Waters had driven his face. But inside he soon is able to see.

Dragging him to a chair, Waters forces him into it, just as Benonski returns, and the two men stand, eyeing the prisoner with varying thoughts.

"Now," says John Waters, with a ring in his tone that Benonski has never heard before, "I will thank you, Mr. Ferrand Merki, as you call yourself, to answer me a question or two."

Attracted by the noise, Alvaroff, Brauna and Vanderveer now come in from the other room.

Brauna is behind her father, but catching sight of the figure in the chair, recognizable even in spite of the sand and bedragglements, she gives a low exclamation of horror and surprise, and shrinks along the wall, staring at him, as she cries:

"My God! It is Merki."

Waters watches her with sympathy, while Vanderveer hastens to support her on one side, and Alvaroff, but little less astounded, on the other.

"This man figures as Ferrand Merki. I am about to ascertain why he has enacted that falsehood," remarks Waters, coolly, then commands: "Stand up!"

Merki, in spite of himself, is brought to his feet by the voice alone. He looks around. He sees the sad, horrified face of the woman. He sees the puzzled look of Benonski, and the calm, searching expression on the face of Alvaroff. Then he looks at Waters.

"I wish you now to disavow this lie that you have concocted. I will give you time to tell the truth. What is your name?"

The man is getting catlike again, and crafty. He does not know the meaning of all this, but he sees that Waters, at least, of this group does not believe him to be Ferrand Merki.

"I am Ferrand Merki. Who else should I be? This woman is my wife. Why have you assaulted me?"

"You lie!"

There grows now that flame of anger in Waters's eye that might have been a warning to a wiser man than Merki.

"Oh, very well, then! Why do you ask me? Perhaps for the satisfaction of telling me that I lie. Who are you, then? You ask questions as if you——"

"Stop! I want them answered. Benonski, put up the screws."

Merki, hearing this, grows a shade paler.

"Look out, now," he says, with a vicious snarl. "I have a later day in which to pay you for this."

Brauna, recovering now, begins to comprehend what Waters means. She is listening to Merki's voice. She is hearing the same tones she hated seven years ago, but she is brave now, buoyed by the powerful, subtle influence of John Waters's presence. She is beginning to hope he will disprove this miracle of a hateful husband, apparently risen from the dead.

Benonski at once produces the thumbscrews that Waters has brought from the torture chamber in Jane Street. Alvaroff, looking on, gives a nod and a gesture of approval.

"You have less than a minute in which to make up your mind," says Waters. "As to being paid—count yourself a lucky man if you leave this room alive. I have already disproved your falsehood. Alvaroff, you see this wretch does not know me. If he were Ferrand Merki he would not forget me until he forgot his mother who bore him. Now I will find out who he is."

Benonski coolly fastens his hooks to the low ceiling, and adjusts the cords. Merki looks on with a scornful smile. He keeps so far an outward semblance of courage. The thumbscrews, however, strike terror to his heart.

"Now, you scoundrel, tell me who you are. Ferrand Merki is dead. That is entirely beyond doubt. You have framed a plot. You wish to kill Dimitri Alvaroff and his daughter and then claim his fortune. You have learned well the story of the marriage in Moscow. You have learned of the murder of Merki. You are trying to impersonate him. You resemble him."

"Idiot," snarls Merki, fighting off to the last, "I will prove that I am Merki by a hundred witnesses.

Great God! Have I not her dagger scars in my back?"

"Strip that man's back, Benonski. If you wish to retire——"

He says this last to Brauna, but she remains. Delicacy, even, can not now be intruded above this startling investigation. Benonski, using his knife, soon strips off the coverings from Merki's back. He carries the light near and they crowd closer to look.

But Waters says coldly:

"Bring me some vinegar."

There is some in the inner room, which serves for a kitchen, and it is soon forthcoming. Merki growls scornfully at this.

"What idiocy will you do now? If my hands were free you would soon——"

"I shall set them free as soon as I see whether these scars are dagger marks. Alvaroff, you are a surgeon—tell me if you ever knew dagger marks to wash off with vinegar?"

With this bold surmise, which, indeed, is only a surmise, Waters takes a piece of his handkerchief and saturates it with the vinegar. They watch him with anxiety. He is undertaking to show that the woman he loves and that Vanderveer loves is not a wife but a widow.

In a minute Waters, with a tender smile at Brauna, drops his handkerchief.

"Have no fear," he laughs. "You are quite as free as if this fellow had never vexed the earth as a living lie. The scars are made. They are merely stains."

Then he makes a little sign to Benonski, who at once cuts the cords with which they have bound Merki's hands. He is glaring about savagely, watching every instant for a chance to escape. He realizes that his course is run out. His cunning scars have been undone. They have deceived Golfi and have given his fraud credence. It has remained for a shrewder man than Golfi to use his reason and some vinegar. His reason assured him that Ferrand Merki died. His vinegar has sponged out the spots.

Finding his hands free, Merki looks about sharply with his furtive eyes, and is about to spring like a cat for the door, when Waters seizes his wrists.

"Adjust them," he commands, "to Benonski."

Merki, seeing his peril at the hands of this resolute man, begins to struggle like a fiend. Again he finds his master. Waters simply holds him with the grip of a Titan while Benonski fastens the instruments upon his thumbs.

Thus secured, his hands are drawn up by a pull at the cords above his head, where to wrench or draw upon them would only be to his own discomfort. It is all done as easily as one ties up a meal sack, in spite of Merki's struggles.

"What is your name?" says Waters, in that terrible voice that made even Alvaroff and Benonski shrink.

"Ferrand Merki. I told you before."

Waters makes no answer, but an imperious little gesture. Benonski understands, and manipulates the screws.

Merki clenches his teeth and turns a little whiter.

"Let up and hear me out then," he says, scowling at the beginning of his pain. "I admit that the scars were doctored. I can tell you why. The dagger was a mere stiletto. It left no marks to speak about. They healed up and turned white, and have nearly or quite disappeared. If you look very closely I think they can still be seen. I doctored them to convince Golfi—and others, of my real identity. When the dagger struck—she was not very powerful—it did not go deep enough to kill."

He is cunning and persistent to the last. He tells this new lie as well as he had told the first one.

"You will be ready to tell the truth when you can't avoid it," sneers Waters. "Benonski, let this man see how they do it in St. Petersburg."

Benonski does not need another word, and the next minute Merki gives an unearthly shriek as the thumb-screws began to bend back his thumbs and raise him upon his toes. He could not endure it long. Waters knows that.

"The truth, now," thunders Waters, like a Nemesis, in his ears.

Merki bears it a little more, growling like a beast between his clenched teeth and pallid lips:

"I have told all. That woman wounded me seven years ago. She only wounded me. I lived and escaped. My body was sold to the medical students. They will tell you that when they came for it they did not secure it. I can prove every word. Now will you let me down and——"

He is cut short by the stern gesture of Waters and another sharp turn on the screws. His face grows ashen with agony.

"Let me down, let me down—I will tell all," he bellows.

"Tell, then. Tell, you devil, or I will twist your thumbs from your wrists, as God hears me."

The group of witnesses looking on, awed, pallid, and entranced, in dead silence wait for the tortured man to speak.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"I HAVE KEPT MY WORD."

"I am Hadrovitch Merki. I am Ferrand Merki's twin brother. Ferrand Merki is dead. That woman murdered him."

Merki says this between his sharp breath, his face contorted with the agony of the thumbscrews. Waters smiles contentedly, then beckons Benonski to let Merki down upon his feet, where the screws mostly release him from their agonizing clutch.

"You have told the truth," says Waters, simply. "But I wish to hear you talk a little farther. You have investigated the murder of your brother, if it was a murder. Who killed him?"

"Who? Why, you know. Everybody knows. That woman killed him. Why else should I follow her? He was my only brother. I heard of his death and I swore never to rest until she and he (pointing

to Alvaroff) were both done for. It was a later thought—that of playing that I am Ferrand. I intended to take my revenge and their money, too. But there is still time. If I escape this alive I will not forget her dagger. She killed him wickedly.”

“It is false. Merki, I see that you do not believe this. If you know who did, then I want you now to tell.”

Waters stops and looks sharply at the prisoner. He is on uncertain ground now. He has disproved the great and wicked fraud. But still he has not accomplished all his purpose. At that moment there is a thunderclap from a clear sky. It comes from Benonski, who steps forward with head downcast, saying:

“It is useless to question him. Mr. Waters, Miss Brauna, Mr. Vanderveer, I myself killed that devil. It was the best deed of my life.”

“You?” they all cry, in profound astonishment.

Even Waters had never looked for this. They all stare at Benonski, as he goes on:

“It is true. Did I not tell you I had and have ever had the power to save you? I had only to go to the gallows. I would have done it. But not as long as there was any other way. I have been a base coward—but I believed you would be saved another way. You know I was in the house that day. I knew Merki in Moscow. You, dear mistress, you do not remember well that you confided in me when you dared not even confide in your father? It was I who advised you to marry him, for I feared otherwise that you would both be sent to Siberia. It was I who helped deceive you, master, when she declared that she would marry Merki from her own choice. I was to blame. She was but a child, but I was a man. I hated that devil who had us all in his power. Yet I advised the marriage. But when we reached America, and I knew how she, too, hated him, and how he was plotting to enforce his claim and torment her with his wicked face, and make her a wife in fact, as she then was only in law—well—he was in the house to threaten her and you. He began on me. I deceived him, and declared

that you were about to accept him as a husband and make the best of the case. Then he turned his back, and a sudden impulse seized me that I could not resist. I killed him. I am glad. I should regret killing a tiger more."

"As God lives, he is speaking the truth, Brauna, the mystery is cleared," cries Alvaroff.

Brauna only stares at him, stunned by this wonderful revelation.

Then John Waters goes to Merki and unbinds his hands, saying:

"You now see that you have no mission against this woman and her father. Merki, you may go."

Hadrovitch Merki glares around him a moment. His thumbs are numbing with the recent torture. His plots have vanished. But there remains one intense thought burning in his confused brain. His brother had been slain and he for years had remembered it with the malice and vengefulness of a demon. Now he has heard the truth. He knows from the ring in Benonski's voice that it is the truth. He is raging with humiliation at the treatment he has been receiving. He wonders why his men do not come and rescue him. He wishes for a day to come when he can put the thumbscrews on this iron fellow who has tortured him and repay the debt. His eyes fix themselves on Benonski. Waters, stepping back, notices this. But before he can speak, Merki acts. He crouches like the cat he is, and leaps at Benonski. Before Waters can drag him away, he has thrown Benonski heavily down and crashed his fists in his face with all the force with which he can strike.

Then he feels the grip of Waters again, and is dragged away. Benonski, bruised and bleeding, struggles up and staggers to a seat.

"I will remember you later. There is another day for all of you," threatens Merki, in a hoarse voice, as he rushes from the cabin.

"He will not be able to trouble us much now," says Waters, coming back into the cabin. "Let us be off."

They are soon in readiness. Vanderveer and Brauna standing together in the outer room of the cabin, Waters calls Vanderveer apart.

"The proprieties must stand, Mr. Vanderveer," he says, with a pleasant little laugh. "And I have provided that they shall. As it is quite plain that she is a widow and no wife—well, you are to go on a voyage together. If that is to your mind I think myself that it is eminently proper to make a wedding trip. Suppose you ask her."

"It is impossible. To accomplish that—much as I wish it—does it not mean a trip to land—risk, perhaps, and more trouble for her?"

"Bugaboos every one," laughs Waters. "Did I not tell you I have provided. If you two agree I will see that you are married in ten minutes."

He shows nothing of his pain. He is only genial and cordial. He has fought his battle and won his victory. And he never does anything by halves. He never recurs to bygones. He has saved them—she will be happy. As for him—well, he will see them safely united, and then life will be for him a mere existence, until it ends. He knows that, but he goes on to it. Such men are born once in a generation.

"I believe you can do even this miracle. But tell me how," says Vanderveer. "You have done everything for us. Do this, and I will believe that you are a magician who can work any wonder you attempt."

"Not any whatever. There are some that I can not do. When she is your wife—well, I say nothing more. But I left a man in the boat, you recall. I introduced him to you as Mr. Russell. Very well. Mr. Russell is a Methodist clergyman."

"The glory he is! Bring him up here, then. I will agree to be ready. Let me tell her."

Ten minutes later they leave the cabin and Waters is saying, as they go, Brauna on her father's arm:

"I congratulate him, Mrs. Vanderveer. When you are in Bordeaux—or even Paris, you can repeat the ceremony more formally, if you choose. May you both be as happy as you wish. Now for the yacht."

They are married, Vanderveer and his magnificent queen! She is glancing back at him from her father's side as he walks behind with Waters.

They go out into the dim night. Down at the far end of the sand strip they can still see the dark forms of the enemy. But between are the resolute men with Martin to lead them. Waters whistles to Martin, who soon appears.

"How is the lay of the land, Martin? They will give up the attempt, think you?"

"I fancy they have done so already," answers Martin. "They have not moved yet. The other boat that has been patrolling the islet has landed and they are all together now, down by the end there. We have only to take to the boats."

Waters glances down again at the mass of men dimly seen between his point of view and the shining sea beyond.

"Are you sure they are all there, Martin?"

"They have made no movement. I think they will not. I should have seen them if they had moved. There is no cover here to speak of."

"Very well. Move down about half way with your men, spreading across the strip as you are now. Then if they move you can reach them quicker. Do not hesitate to shoot when you must. We will get to the boats. As soon as we can get one off and are on the way I will fire a shot and you can then follow in the others. Our force is strong enough for any emergency. Merki has seen you as he went back. He will know better than to attack, I think."

Nevertheless Waters is uneasy. As he turns away from Martin he glances up to the sky. The pallid stars burning above him in the vault of the midnight make him shiver. He has lost all that life has for him. He has surrendered to destiny, and in doing it he has emptied his heart on these dreary sands. He glances about the night. The moaning, sighing ocean, monotonously smiting the shore, fills him with the unspeakable restlessness of its own unceasing discontent. And with it all he feels the chill of some approaching disaster.

But he sets his teeth and puts on his old smile as he turns to the group who are awaiting his leadership.

"All is well. Merki and his men are still there. Let us go."

The boats are on the landward side, except the one in which Waters and Vanderveer had come, which was left on the ocean side. It is this boat they will take. It is drawn well up out of the low surf where they have left it.

But both Waters and Martin have been deceived. Hadrovitch Merki is not the kind of man to abandon his vengeance thus easily. He knows the force that he must meet if he attacks the cabin, but he is too cunning for that. While Martin believed that he and all his men were at the end of the sand strip they had made their plans. Merki himself and five or six of his fellows, daring Nihilists who will obey Merki because they believe they are obeying Golfi, have thrown themselves on their faces, and even while the marriage was proceeding inside the cabin, they have crawled along the sands behind fringes of beach grass and hummocks of seaweed as rapidly as they could, until they are now crouching close by the place where two men guard Waters's boat, as they have been directed. Merki and his men watch their chance, and at the very minute when the group is issuing from the cabin after the marriage, succeed in throwing themselves upon this guard and overpowering them before they can so much as give the alarm. They are dragged into the grass out of reach and securely bound and gagged. Then at a little distance in a sand hollow, screened by a little fringe of scrubby oak brush that had once formed a hunter's blind, Merki waits for his prey. He has the matter accurately figured out. He knows very well that the steam yacht a few miles from the shore must be intended to take off the fugitives. He reasons that they will take the same boat in embarking that Waters had brought here. The other two boats on the shore side Merki knows have been here before Waters could have arrived.

His calculations are well timed. His men have hardly crouched out of sight here and received the desperate orders of Merki to kill or capture, when the forms of the coming party are seen in the moonlight.

Waters half way down sees nothing of his men. This warns him.

"Wait here an instant. I will go ahead and investigate," he says to the others. Suiting his action to his word he advances toward the boats. Feeling sure there is something amiss, he proceeds with great caution.

Merki, seeing him approach, recognizes the terrible man who put him to his torture not a half-hour earlier. He whispers to his men, gloating in his heart at the prospect of getting even with this terrible enemy.

When Waters has nearly reached the boat, Merki gives the signal to his men to rise up and rush.

John Waters, stopping suddenly, knows in the flash of an eye what the situation is. Before the first man has advanced ten feet he is shot dead in his tracks. Another, attempting to go on, is winged by a bullet in his limb, and scrambles with a scream to cover again. Waters turns promptly, running back to the remainder of the party.

"Strike across for the other boats," he commands, in rapid accents. "I will undertake to cover the retreat."

They instantly change their direction, and start across the sand ridge, toward the point where the other boats are drawn up. Merki, fearing they are successfully escaping, urges his men to the pursuit.

"Rush down all and push off the nearest boat. I will be with you in a minute," says Waters. They are panting with their exertions, and intense excitement. Vanderveer keeps closely by his wife's side, Martin and Alvaroff aiding him in making a cover between her and the direction from which any bullets of the pursuers might be expected.

They reach the shore.

Vanderveer and Alvaroff seize the boat and attempt to push her off. She is stuck hard in the sand, and it takes all the strength of both and considerable time to accomplish this. Meanwhile Waters, pausing on the height of the ridge, kneels and watches. By the dim light he fancies he sees a figure crouching behind a sand heap, not far down the slope of the beach. Then he sees the flash of a weapon, and notes the sand fly close beside him where the bullet strikes. Instantly

he fires. There is a scream; he recognizes the voice of Merki. The figure struggles away out of sight, while two more shots pelt the sand near him. Then he hears Vanderveer calling him to come. They have succeeded in getting the boat into the water.

He rises and dashes down to the beach. As he does so there is another shot from another nearer cover. He gives a little sharp cry, but represses it at once and reaches the boat.

"Push off. Take oars, Mr. Vanderveer," he says, staggering into the boat and sitting down. "Keep low, Mrs. Vanderveer. The danger is almost over. They will not risk an assault. I have taught them a lesson, I fancy."

Vanderveer, a splendid oarsman, gives a half-dozen strong pulls at the oars, and the boat sweeps out upon the sea. More shots follow them, one of them splintering the rail close to Brauna's head. Then they hear the shouts of Waters's men, who, roused by the noises of the encounter, came rushing into view on the ridge.

"They will take care of the rest of it," says Waters, confidently. "Merki, if he still lives, knows that we are now beyond his reach. He will not care to risk anything by continuing the conflict with my men. The shooting has not been resumed, you see."

He is sitting pale in the moonlight in the stern of the boat. His face, on which the light falls, seems to Brauna almost seraphic. As the boat glides away and rounds the point of the islet, she is recalling what he has done for them all.

He has been greater than Golfi, greater than Merki, greater than Vanderveer. He has succeeded.

As they keep on and out toward the steam yacht that they can discern in dark outline a mile away, the other boat has rounded the point and is coming after. It is filled with Waters's men, who, meeting with no more obstacles, are hastening to rejoin their commander.

They reach the yacht, Vanderveer, Alvaroff, and Martin assisting Brauna to the deck, and mounting there themselves. But Waters, as if in a dream, sits still in the boat.

They looked down at him in some wonder until Vanderveer, noting how pale he is, leaps back into the boat, crying:

"My God, Mr. Waters, are you hurt? Come, help, Martin."

"It is nothing, I think. That last bullet struck too near."

Alarmed, they help him to the deck, and then they notice the blood drenching his clothing. They lay him tenderly upon a sail, that is soon turning crimson in the moonlight.

"Bring a light—and my chest of medicines," says Alvaroff, kneeling beside him.

"It is late for medicines," says Waters, faintly. "I am glad it did not happen earlier. I have kept my word."

Alvaroff, with his experience, examining the wound, shakes his head.

Tearful they kneel around him. As they sail out into the east, the shadow of the world's last great mystery falls upon his face.

"He was a great heart," says Vanderveer, with tears in his eyes. "He died for us."

Brauna does not answer. She is looking into the glowing east. The tones of his voice ring in her ears, and again she remembers his look that night at Graystone as he said:

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